

A HISTORY OF FARM WOMEN'S WORK IN MANITOBA

by

Carolina Antoinetta J. A. van de Vorst

A thesis  
presented to the University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
Anthropology

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Far too little is known about farm women the world over. This being said, more information is available on Third World women in farming than on farm women in western, industrialized countries according to Liz Willick, Farm Woman and Development Educator ("Women Hold up Half the Sky", Conference Proceedings, 1982). Delegates to the conference "Women and Food Production: Canada and the Third World", held in 1984, established that research into the history of farm women in Canada is crucial in attempting to build links among women in farming. These delegates noted, furthermore, that a study of the past may harbour solutions to current problems in agriculture (Conference Proceedings, 1984). With this in mind, I began a study of the history of farm women's work in Manitoba.

The downturn in the Canadian economy in recent years has drawn attention to women's work in agriculture in Canada. Farm women across the country have organized to share concerns and solutions. They themselves have begun to document their economic contributions to the farm economy through a series of studies which serve in lobbying government for support and legal recognition. For example, the first national farm women's conference, held in Ottawa in 1980, produced a number of working

papers dealing with such topics as farm women and property law in Canada, women's unequal access to farm credit and the lack of media recognition for women's work in agriculture (Conference Proceedings, 1980). Other examples are the studies conducted by the Ontario-based groups Women for the Survival of Agriculture (Watkins, 1985) and Concerned Farm Women (Ireland, 1983). The National Farmer's Union \* has also conducted research into the economic activities of farm women (Koski, 1982).

Gradually, interest in farm women's issues has grown outside their own circles. For example, needs-assessment studies have been carried out by the Council on Rural Development Canada\*\* (1979) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (McGhee, 1985). Likewise, the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women published an article entitled "Concerns of Farm Women" (Schwanke, 1985) and, of late, the Canadian Advisory Committee on the Status of Women has released a report on women in agriculture (1987).

Women's work in agriculture has long been neglected in the academic world. However, the last decade has witnessed an upswing in interest. Several academic works which have contributed to this thesis are Kohl's study of farm women in southwestern Saskatchewan (1979), Sachs' study of women in American agriculture (1983), Smith's research on the trends in women's involvement in Canadian agriculture (1985), and Berry's paper on the labour allocation of Manitoba farm women (1986).

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\* Hereafter NFU. \*\* Hereafter CRDC.

Despite growing numbers of academic and non-academic studies on women in farming, there is very little historical documentation of farm women's work. Exceptions are the studies by Kohl, Sachs, and, more recently, Sara Sundberg's article on prairie pioneer women (1986) and Mary Kinnear's article on women's work on the farm in the early decades of this century (1988). Kinnear has focused on farm women's work in Manitoba, using the findings of a 1922 survey by the United Farm Women of Manitoba and testimonies of farm women published in the Grain Growers Guide in the summer of 1922.

In an effort to document not only what work farm women did in the past, but how and why it has changed, censuses and other government statistics, local histories and general histories were consulted. However, it is not possible to get an adequate understanding of women's role in agriculture from these sources. For example, government sources such as the annual reports of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture are limited in scope. They focus in particular on farm commodity production. For example, little information has been gathered on the historic changes in poultry raising, dairying and garden production for subsistence. Prior to the 1940s, poultry keeping is described in Ellis'\* words as "often nondescript" farm flocks which "played a useful, if relatively minor, role in the farm economy" (1971:436). Once commercial poultry operations, dairying and market gardens become

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\* J.H. Ellis has written a history of agriculture in Manitoba reflecting primarily the activities of the Manitoba Ministry of Agriculture from 1870 to 1970, using annual reports to document changes.

established, they receive full consideration.\* Such commercial enterprises are usually the domain of men. Given that subsistence production by women met the food needs of the majority of Manitoba's population until recent decades, this lack of information is a significant oversight in assessing provincial, agricultural production.

Censuses reveal additional biases stemming from data-collection methods. Sociologist Pamela Smith has argued that "there are many difficulties with using national census figures to assess the type, nature and extent of women's contribution to Canadian agriculture" (Smith, 1987:194). For example, housework is not considered an occupation and women who provide this labour on the farm are excluded from census figures. Moreover, the census allows for only one occupation to be reported (Smith, 1987:194). Women who work on and off the farm and report their off-farm job as their occupation find their farm-labour contribution excluded from census figures. In addition, the census reports work done in the last week of May as an indication of people's labour practices. However, as Smith pointed out, May is not the busiest month on the farm and since women tend to have a lower labour input in commercial farm production at this time, census figures underestimate women's overall input in farming

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\* See, for example, Ellis' description (1971:430-438) of the developments in commercial poultry raising on the basis of government records and statistics. With respect to home dairying, government statistics before 1918 did not represent production for subsistence and, after 1918, no distinction is made between amounts marketed and amounts consumed on the farm. See for examples Ellis (1971:273). With respect to gardening, statistics focus similarly on commercial production. See for examples Ellis (1971:403-411; 424-428).

(Smith, 1987:194). Another problem arises with the census category of "farm operator". Since only one person on the farm can be identified as the farm operator in the Agriculture Census, and since this person is usually the male, women's involvement on census farms remains obscured (Smith, 1987:130,135,195).

Early surveys exhibit similar biases. The surveys published in the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement series, for example, were based on information collected from "the heads of more than two thousand farm families" (Dawson and Younge, 1940:xi emphasis added). It is evident from the surveys that the researchers of these sources are predominately male. The research procedure of males talking to males is not likely to reveal a full range of information on both genders. Male-biased data collection can only lead to male-biased interpretation. In some volumes of the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement series, women's work is, at best, assumed. There are occasional, superficial references to women but they do not form part of the overall analysis.\*

A male focus is also evident in local histories. Family accounts in local histories, for example, generally trace the male line. The local history of Rathwell is one illustration. Headings of family accounts are almost exclusively comprised of the names of male heads of households such as "The Walter Frost Family" or "John, Henry and Ross Carter" (Rathwell, 1970:173,135). Women are assumed in their father's and husband's identities or are mentioned in passing as wives, mothers and daughters. Local

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\* Examples of this can be found in the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement series (volume 5:67-83; 132-212; volume 8:130-158).

histories also tend to provide and/or emphasize the names of pioneer men in connection with certain milestones such as the first homesteads, crops and roads. A dominant male focus obscures the role of women. Notably, local histories compiled by Women's Institute members such as the Fisher Branch and Minnedosa accounts tend to be more inclusive of women.

Michael Ewanchuk's ethnic history of Ukrainian settlement in Manitoba also exhibits a male focus. He generally attributed active roles to men. For example, one of his informants, Zydor Zelenitsky is given recognition for being Gimli's first Ukrainian homesteader and credit for building the family home. However, in his account, Zelenitsky himself noted his wife's contributions in almost every second sentence, indicating the mutual dependence and support of all members of pioneer farm families (Ewanchuk, 1977:27-29).

Since government documents and first-hand accounts form the basis for general historical sources, any bias and the resulting distortion can be readily perpetuated. Historians have often uncritically adopted society's expectations of farm gender roles. Accordingly, the published history of agriculture in Manitoba is dominated by a male perspective which largely excludes women's role in agricultural history. This male bias finds expression through the use of the conventional male, third-person-singular writing style which obscures women's involvement. This style does not lend itself to an exposee of women's work alongside that of men. By embedding women's work in generic description,



studies become inadequate as sources on farm women.\* Male bias shows up in three other distinct ways. First, descriptions of farming routines generally focus on farm-commodity production including male activities only.\*\* Explicit female tasks such as food preservation, dairying, cloth manufacture and farm operation when husbands are absent are not mentioned. Second, the participation of females within the activities conventionally described as being performed by men is obscured. This, for instance, is the case with reaping grain and haying.\*\*\* Third, descriptions of technology usually focus on tools handled by men;\*\*\*\* the walking-plough or threshing machine are mentioned, the spinning-wheel and scrubbing board are not. An additional shortcoming in general historical sources is the fact that they have relegated the work of women to the household, which is viewed as unrelated to the raising of crops and livestock. The direct and indirect economic benefits of women's work for the family farm or the provincial and national economy at large are

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\* Examples of this can be found, among others, in the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement series (volume 5:143; volume 8:16,24); in Morton (1967:255,330,392); and in Friesen (1984:184,309,432). In these examples, the terms "pioneer", "settler", "homesteader", "operator" and "farmer" are attributed implicitly to the male gender only.

\*\* Examples are found in Morton (1967:85-87,257) and in Friesen (1984:329-331). Even grain growing in pre-commercial days still receives a disproportionately large amount of attention and emphasis by writers such as Morton (1967:86-7) since it carried the seeds of commercialization of prairie agriculture.

\*\*\* Examples can be found in Morton (1967:86-87) and Kaye (1984) with respect to the Red River Settlement and are discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

\*\*\*\* For examples see Morton (1967:164-165) and Friesen (1984:319,430-431).

not examined. Subsistence activities which are not linked to market forces in the public sphere of society remain historically and economically invisible.

Gerald Friesen's work, written in the 1980s, serves as an example. His prairie history is novel in that it tries to provide a political-economic analysis of prairie social life rather than the more traditional recording of major events. His historical sources include, among others, many autobiographical novels written by farm men and women. Despite his efforts to present a balanced social history of the prairie provinces, Friesen has fallen victim to male bias. For example, although he has discussed men's farm work in terms of predictable, annual routines (1984:329-331), he asserted that "The work week of farm women varied so much that normal or typical routines did not exist for them" (Friesen, 1984:307). This conclusion is surprising since Friesen derived information on farm women's work patterns from Kathleen Strange's autobiography. This source provides a detailed description of the author's "typical" weekly activities as well as information on her, rather predictable, seasonal work. While the "farmers" harrow, seed and cultivate the fields from early spring until late July, the women appear to jump into action only in late summer and early fall when they

put in hundreds of hours preserving pickles, sauerkraut, and berries, filling stone crocks with onions, corn and cabbage, baking extra butter tarts, carrot loaves, and date squares while the men readied the machinery, the spare parts, and the animals for the burst of activity on which their way of life depended (Friesen, 1984:330).

Unintentionally, Friesen's descriptions may create the impression that, whereas a man's contribution to the farm was steady and reliable, a woman's contribution was erratic and perhaps less important to the overall success of prairie farming. Farm success and viability appear to be determined by a man's activity on the farm, not by a man's and woman's mutual efforts.

This particular bias finds further expression in an explanation put forward by Friesen on the high failure rate among bachelors as compared to married men on the frontier. He cited a study which, among other factors, attributed a high failure rate among bachelors to their not having "to prove up in order to ensure family survival" whereas the lower failure rate among older, married men was attributed to the fact that they "could not afford to fail" due to family responsibilities (Friesen, 1984:310). Bachelors, in contrast to married men, were "not constrained by home ties [and] were free to try again elsewhere" (ibid). This explanation would seem to stem from the commonly adhered to notion that men are the family providers. Although Friesen recognized the shortcomings of this explanation and noted "environmental unsuitability" and "policy" as additional factors, he has failed to consider the presence of women on the successful homesteads of married men. Notably, Ellis commented that bachelors generally did not keep livestock for subsistence purposes but that this changed once they married (1971:619). The high failure rate of bachelors begs the question of women's roles in enhancing the economic stability of farms.

When viewed in terms of women's right to establish homesteads independently of men, Friesen's gender insensitivity has allowed him to overlook a major distortion of prairie history. While he defused the common myth that there was no significant social distinctions or gradations between families in early prairie farm history (1984:311), women's economic opportunities in western Canada were far from equal to men's since they were not allowed to file for a homestead in their own right. Friesen has failed to mention this and silence would lead one to assume that discriminatory homestead regulations did not exist in western Canada.

Anthropological research has been characterized by male bias as well. This has led to theoretical distortions (Leacock, 1975; Reiter, 1975). In the study of intensive agricultural systems, the focus has been on male pursuits. A common presumption has been that, because women are not directly involved in field work, they do not contribute substantially to agriculture (Ember, 1983:236). Social science research on farm women has traditionally described farm women's work in the context of nurturing, maintaining and reproducing the farm labour force. Their work is seen to take place in the domestic sphere which is viewed not as a unit of production but as one of consumption, separate from farm production. This perspective has led to insufficient recognition both of the value of women's domestic work and of women's work as farm labourers (Shaver, 1982:3-4). What this study shows is that intensive agriculture is not an exclusively male domain.

In this study, I examine farm women's work and how it has changed since the Red River Settlement. This change is documented in the larger context of ecological conditions and social and economic processes which affect farm women's work. Following a chapter on methodological orientation, a description is provided of women's and men's farm work in the subsistence era of Manitoba's agricultural history, that is, the Red River Settlement and the early pioneer periods. This is followed by a chapter on the circumstances under which expansion of commercial, field-crop production transformed women's work in farming. Next, the character of women's economic contributions to farming in the commercial era is described. Finally, an assessment of the nature and conditions affecting women's farm work in recent decades is given.

While this thesis does not pretend to be comprehensive, it provides an overview of farm women's work, how and why it has changed and, to a somewhat lesser extent, how farm women's work interfaced with the work of their husbands. It is an initial step in acknowledging the contribution of farm women to agricultural development in Manitoba -- a contribution which has been subject to a high degree of understatement. In documenting Manitoba farm women's work, this thesis joins other recent studies in helping to fill a void. I hope that farm women can identify with it.

## Chapter II

### METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Given the lack of information available on the history of farm women's work in Manitoba, primary research was necessary. As a result, the thesis is ethnohistorical in nature. Data collection and integration was undertaken under influence of two theoretical schools of thought, that is cultural materialism and historical materialism. Both give priority to studying material conditions of society in attempts to understand socio-cultural phenomena.

Cultural materialism developed out of the research strategy of cultural ecology. In The Rise of Anthropological Theory, author Marvin Harris explained that

in the cultural ecological strategy, techno-environmental and techno-economic variables are accorded research priority... [This conforms with] the hypothesis that social organization and ideology tend to be the dependent variables in any large diachronic sample of sociocultural systems (1968:658).

In his book Cultural Materialism, Harris redefined the parameters of techno-environmental and techno-economic variables. These variables, that is, habitat, demography and technology, constitute the infrastructure of a given society. The priority given to identifying the material conditions of sociocultural phenomena is called the "principle of infrastructural determinism" (Harris, 1979:56-8).

Historical materialism, which finds its roots in Marxist thought, ascribes ultimate causality to some of the same variables. These variables, which make up the "economic base" or infrastructure of a society are encompassed in the "mode of production". The mode of production embraces the "forces of production", that is, all of the material conditions of production including land, raw materials, tools and labour power, and the "relations of production", that is, the relations between people in the production process (Lemaire,1975:8; Terray,1972:98). Marx himself held that "the mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life" (Bottomore,1983:335). However, of the two components of the mode of production, the forces of production are seen as the prime movers causing conflict with the relations of production ultimately leading to transformations in the social, political and ideological facets, that is, the superstructure of a society (Lemaire,1978:1).

In researching farm women's economic activities, I have given priority to the ecological and economic conditions underlying farming in Manitoba. This is apparent in the organization of the thesis. Each chapter begins with an outline of ecological and economic changes which affect gender roles in farming and thus farm women's activities. Ecological factors are those relating to habitat, including soils, climatic conditions as well as the biological characteristics of cultigens like maturation rate and resistance to disease. Other ecological factors include

demographic factors like population density, family size and sex ratios, and technological factors such as historical change in farm and domestic technology and in transportation. Ecological factors also subsume economic factors in that the latter are facets of the environments of farming populations. Economic factors include changing access to both local and export markets, the encroachment of the cash economy and overall economic fluctuations, as well as the relative financial resources of individual farm families who settled in Manitoba. On the basis of these factors, I document and analyze gender-specific work roles or, in other words, the sexual division of labour in Manitoba farming.

There has been a longstanding interest in the cross-cultural study of gender roles in intensive agriculture. Various anthropologists (Martin and Voorhies, 1975; Kottak, 1982; Boserup, 1970; Ember, 1983; Burton and White, 1984) have argued that women's contribution to agriculture relative to that of men declined with the intensification of cultivation. Ember recognized that "most of the explanations offered for that decline view women as being 'pushed out' of agriculture because males take over plowing and irrigation" (1983:285). She has criticized this interpretation and has argued that "women are 'pulled into' additional domestic work with the intensification of agriculture, and that this additional work explains the relative decline in women's contribution to agriculture" (1983:285). She has assumed that increased domestic work will



fall largely on the shoulders of women rather than men because this can be more easily combined with nursing and child care than work outside the home (1983:287). She has attributed greater work load to three factors drawing women away from field work. Women have to spend more time and energy in food processing because of the use of cereal crops. Women also spend more time on household chores. And, child care has become more time- and energy-consuming.

Cereal crops require more processing and preparation than the root crops which are more common to horticultural systems, because they are generally dried whole and therefore require longer cooking times after pounding or milling and, at times, threshing and winnowing (Ember, 1983:290). Household chores maybe more involved due to several factors. For example, larger permanent residences with more possessions require more frequent cleaning. In addition, because longer cooking time is required for the preparation of cereal crops, more fuel and water must be collected and, if utensils and pots are used, wash-up chores increase. Ember explained further that intensive agriculturalists are more likely to live in temperate regions. As a result, women spend comparatively more time preparing food for storage because food is seasonal rather than available year-round as is common in tropical and subtropical regions. Moreover, as inhabitants of temperate climates, more clothing is necessary, increasing the laundering chores. This clothing is more likely to be made of cloth rather than hides, increasing

women's cloth and clothes manufacturing. Ember added that intensive agriculturalists are more likely to participate in a money economy whereby possessions can be acquired through purchase. Women may labour more to produce crafts for sale (1983:291).

Intensive agriculturalists also tend to have more children due to higher fertility\* and the desire to have more children because of the recognition that children are productive family members (1983:291). Ember noted that having more children involves greater child-care and domestic chores.

[If] mothers are the principal caretakers of infants, a shorter birth interval must surely increase child care responsibilities for the mother. If a mother has a child every two years, she almost always has a baby to care for. If the birth interval is longer, she may be partly freed from child care by asking an older child to be the caretaker. But the burden of children is not just in child care. Even if a mother does not directly care for her children herself, they still constitute additional household members who have to be fed and possibly clothed. Directly or indirectly, then, more children probably mean more domestic work (1983:296-297).

Ember recognized that these pull factors are joined by the tendency of men to be heavily involved in the expanded field-work tasks characterizing intensive agriculture. Men, she argued, are less likely to be drawn away from agricultural work than in

---

\* Ember has suggested several factors responsible for higher fertility among intensive agriculturalists. These are: changes in economy and diet leading to the earlier onset of ovulation after giving birth and lower incidences of sterility and venereal disease as compared to horticulturalists. Other factors are the relaxation of cultural mechanisms in controlling fertility such as post-partum sex taboos, contraception, abortion and female infanticide. For a discussion of these factors, see Ember (1983:293-296).

horticultural societies by such activities as hunting, warfare, and long distance trade. These activities are usually eliminated from the routines of male intensive agriculturalists by reliance on domesticated livestock for animal protein and professional armies and merchants (1983:297-299).

Burton and White identified an additional variable in societies of intensive agriculturalists which can be viewed as a pull factor drawing women out of field-crop production. They write:

We hypothesize that increased dependence on domesticated animals will place a severe constraint on women's agricultural time and that very high amounts of dependence on domesticated animals will result in sharply curtailed female agricultural inputs\* (1984:573).

They noted that, because livestock is kept near the household, women are more likely to care for them. Women commonly perform livestock-care tasks such as feeding, gathering dung for fuel or building materials, watering livestock, milking and dairying, meat preservation, care of infant stock, and the processing of animal products like hides and wool (1984:572).

The analysis presented in this thesis was inspired in part by the theoretical discussion provided by Ember on the development of gender roles in intensive agriculture. I have coined the analytical concepts of "pull" and "push" factors, based on Ember's theoretical discussion, and have applied them to conditions specific to Manitoba's agricultural history.

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\* This quote displays an important source of potential confusion in that it equates "agriculture" with field-crop production alone.

The analytical concept of "work process" has been particularly useful in highlighting the push and pull factors involved in changing gender roles in Manitoba farming. This concept was derived from More Work for Mother, Ruth Cowan's study of the historical changes in housework and household technology from the beginning of European settlement in the United States to the present. She wrote:

The phrase work process is used instead of the simpler term work in order to highlight the fact that no single part of housework is a simple, homogenous activity. One might be tempted to say that housework can be divided into a series of separable tasks -- cooking, cleaning, laundering, child care, etcetra. This analysis does not go far enough, however, because each of these tasks is linked to others that it does not resemble. Cooking, for example, involves the treatment of raw or semi-raw foodstuffs so that they can, or will, be consumed; that much is obvious. Perhaps not so obviously, cooking also involves the procurement of those foodstuffs (by buying them or raising them), and their storage and prior preparation (by canning, salting, freezing, refrigerating, et cetera), the maintenance of the energy source (stoking the hearth, damping the stove, adding the coal) that is used to do the cooking, the maintenance and cleaning of the tools that are used to do the cooking, and the disposal of the waste that results from the process. Similarly laundering is a matter not just of washing clothes but of moving them from place to place, of drying them, perhaps ironing them and putting them away, as well as acquiring the chemical agents -- most notably soap and water -- that will assist in the process. The concept of work process reminds us that housework (indeed, all work) is a series ... of definable tasks that are necessarily linked to one another ... This concept also becomes important when we try to discover whether industrialization has made housework easier. We must ask not only whether one activity has been altered, but also whether the chain in which that activity is a link has been transformed (Cowan, 1983:11-12).

Cowan has argued that the history of housework, that is, the entire array of domestic work processes, can not be understood

unless one studies the history of change in implements with which housework is done. The historical changes in household technology are labelled the "industrialization of the home". As she argued, modern housework has come to depend on non-human energy sources and on institutions outside the family like agribusiness, implement manufacturers and utility companies (Cowan, 1983:4-7).

In order to grasp the history of household technology Cowan utilized the concept of "technological system". She argued that:

Just as the activities of which housework is composed are complex, linked, and heterogenous, so are the implements with which it is done ... Each implement used in the home is part of a sequence of implements -- a system -- in which each must be linked to others in order to function appropriately. To put it bluntly: an electric range will not be much good if electric current is missing and a washing machine cannot function in the absence of running water and grated soap ... The concept of a technological system becomes important in understanding the processes by which the American homes become industrialized (Cowan 1983:13).

Cowan's emphasis on understanding technological change is congruent with my theoretical approach, that is, giving research priority to material conditions. Her work has shown that changes in the technological system underlying housework have resulted in profound shifts in the time and energy allocations of the various household members who carry out the tasks comprising household work processes. She has illustrated how the introduction of new technology, deemed 'labour-saving', in fact reduced the labour involvement of men, children and servants in domestic work rather than that of women. Her findings have led her to conclude that

the industrialization of the home has separated the work of men and children from the work of women in the domestic sphere (1983:99). With this separation, "men and children could be spared, to the schools, to the factories, to the offices of the burgeoning industrial economy" (1983:66). In other words, industrialization of the home "created the material conditions under which the doctrine of separate spheres -- could take root and flourish [sic]" (1983:66-67). Cowan pointed out that:

One of the most profound effects of industrialization was, and is, the separation of "work places" from "home places" - and the attendant designation of the former as the "place" for men and the latter as the "domain" of women - the set of ideas and behavior which was called, in the nineteenth century, the doctrine of "separate spheres" (1983:18).\*

Cowan's analysis of the impact of the industrialization of housekeeping on North American gender roles can be applied to the agricultural sector. The separation of domestic gender roles meant that men could be "spared" to the commercial field crop and livestock components of farm operations.

The use of the concept of separate spheres has led some academic and lay people alike to view domestic work as being dislocated and independent from work in the market-place. This is ironic given the analysis advanced by writers like Cowan that

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\* Anthropologists commonly refer to the "doctrine of separate spheres" as the "inside-outside dichotomy" (Martin and Voorhies, 1975:290) or the "private" ("domestic") versus "public" ("extra-domestic") "domains" ("spheres") (Ember, 1983:300; Reiter, 1975:252-282). The focus when applying these concepts is usually on female status. In this thesis, the focus is on farm women's work and the distinction made between domestic and extra-domestic spheres serves to indicate different aspects of women's work on the farm.

women's performance of domestic work freed men to enter the market-place.

The misconception has arisen, in part, out of the notion that economic production in the household has been taken over by industry and that some aspects of major services like health care and education have been institutionalized. Consequently, the household is seen as having lost its productive function, becoming exclusively a unit of consumption. Anja Meulenbelt, a Dutch Marxist Feminist, has pointed out that historical materialists in fact view the family in industrial society as a superstructural phenomenon in which only socialization of children and consumption remain of its traditional functions (1975:644). In addition, the family, and women in particular, are regarded as a reserve labour pool. These attributes are particularly evident in Claude Maillassoux' study, Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community, in which he described the incorporation of the Domestic Mode of Production and more specifically the institution of the family into the Capitalist Mode of Production. Maillassoux wrote:

Today ... the family has no economic infrastructure ... it remains an institution within which birth, nurture and education of children take place thanks to the largely unpaid labour of parents, particularly of the mothers. It remains the locus of the production and reproduction of labour power [while] it lacks any other productive role ... (1981:141).

Maillassoux has suggested that the advent of certain labour-saving devices and the assumption of certain domestic tasks by state institutions, for example collective child care, result in

the "liberation of the female labour force" and, ultimately "help to dissolve the family" (1981:143).

Historical materialists like Meillassoux make a valid point in arguing that the family, and particularly the role of women therein, reproduce labour power through procreation and socialization. However, as both Meulenbelt and Cowan have argued, they are wrong in viewing the household only as a unit of consumption. Housewives produce a multitude of goods and services not provided by service industries and social institutions. Cowan pointed out that with their industrialization, households,

did not cease to be productive locales: they continued to produce goods and services intended for use at home or, as the Marxists would say, for the production and the reproduction of labor power ... [The] household continued to be the locale in which meals, clean laundry, healthy children, and well-fed adults were 'produced' - and housewives continued to be the workers who were primarily responsible (Cowan, 1981:100).

Meulenbelt noted in the same vein that,

The most labour-intensive aspect of the reproduction of labour power is domestic work: the care of small children, cleaning the immediate living quarters, and the absorption of tension (1975:656 translated from Dutch by C. Van De Vorst).

Meulenbelt explained that the economic importance of housework becomes apparent when one considers how family members would cope without the services of housewives: they would have less energy and time to devote to the labour process in the market-place (1975:656).



Meulenbelt has criticized Marx for viewing a family's standard of living as being dependent solely on income earned by family members working in the market-place (1975:659). For example, she noted that food purchased with the income of family wage earners cannot be immediately consumed. A housewife invests labour in its preparation. This also determines a family's standard of living. Meulenbelt wrote that the relationship between income and standard of living given women's added labour is particularly apparent when inflation outstrips wage increases. Housewives work harder to maintain the same standard of living. They buy less processed foods, will make and mend clothes more often, put more effort into bargain hunting and will postpone the purchase of appliances by resorting to more labour-intensive means of getting housework done. "They function as a buffer, absorbing the initial shock of an economic crisis; they ensure that the labour power of workers remains the same in the face of reductions in real income" (1975:660 translated from Dutch by C.Van De Vorst).

This argument finds support in Meg Luxton's study of three generations of women's work in the home in Flin Flon, a northern Manitoba mining town. She wrote:

By managing their home skillfully ... women try to achieve the highest standard of living ... During periods of economic crisis, for example, women intensify different aspects of their labour in an effort to stretch the budget. They may shop more frugally, do more mending, or take on a paid job (Luxton, 1980:17).

Luxton, like Meulenbelt and Cowan, has criticized the Marxist focus on "industrial production" and has argued that, rather than being a unit of consumption, the household is a productive locale in which women produce "goods and services for the family's use, such as cooked meals, clean clothes and a pleasant environment in the home" (Luxton, 1980:16). Her study of the historical changes in housework and its economic link with commercial labour processes runs parallel with my own analysis of farm women's domestic work.

In this thesis, I have adopted the Marxist-Feminist theory that the domestic sphere and the commercial sphere are integrally linked. I have also adopted the theory that housewives reproduce labour power on a day-to-day basis as well as on a generation-to-generation basis. In other words, they reproduce a major component of the forces of production on the farm: human labour power. In accordance with Marxist-Feminist theory (Meulenbelt, 1975:648; Luxton, 1980:15-16), I reject the classical, historical-materialist notion that housewives are non-workers because their work does not take place in the market-place. There can be no doubt that women's work in the home is economically important. While they may not be 'labourers' in the strict Marxian sense that they produce added value in a production process, they do replenish the labour power which does.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, this thesis is first and foremost a presentation of ethnohistorical information

on farm women's work in Manitoba. The theories and concepts borrowed from historical and cultural materialism have served as a guideline for primary data collection and preliminary interpretation. While the analysis is akin to Marxian-Feminist theory, it is in no way a full-fledged application thereof.

## 2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 2.2.1 Research Problem

Based on preliminary literature and archival research plus initial interviews, a research problem was defined embracing the following questions.

1. What is the nature of farm women's work in the home, on the farm and off the farm at present?
2. What has been the nature of farm women's work in the past?
3. How has farm women's work changed?
4. Why has it changed?
5. How does ethnic background influence the nature of farm women's work?
6. What is the impact on farm women's work of geographical location, given the variation in growing conditions and in economic conditions affecting agriculture from one location to another?
7. How is women's farm work influenced by macro-economic conditions such as cyclical bust periods (recessions) and boom periods?

8. What is the impact of changes in farm and domestic technology on farm women's work?

In accordance with the epistemological principles of the cultural- and historical-materialist research strategies,\* the etic method was used in answering these questions. With this method, concepts are employed which are not necessarily meaningful to informants. Rather, the concepts used are meaningful to the researcher and the discipline. Those concepts used in this study which do not coincide directly with jargon used by informants are "work process", "push" and "pull" factors, "incomeor resource-generating" and "income- or resource-conserving (economizing) strategies", "prime" versus "marginal farming areas", and "primary" versus "secondary settlement areas". These concepts are defined as they appear in the context of the thesis. Widely used concepts are "family farm", "farm women", "mixed farms" and "specialized operations". The meanings commonly ascribed to these terms are also provided in the context of the thesis.

The term "farm women" includes women who are or have been married and are living on a family farm. The concept "family farm" is defined in various ways, but for the purpose of this thesis, I have adopted Pamela Smith's definition. She characterized a family farm as one "where most or all of the labour required to operate the farm is provided by members of the

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\* For references to the epistemological principles of cultural and historical materialism see Harris (1979:26-27) and Bottomore (1983:149-150, 324-326) respectively.

family, which owns the other necessary resources: land and equipment" (1987:130). Smith noted that "family farming is still the most prevalent mode of Canadian agricultural production: in 1981, 87% of all Canadian farms were family farms" (1987:141).

#### 2.2.2 Research Plan

Primary and secondary sources were used to establish general social and economic trends and document the changes in farm women's work. Major primary sources were interviews with farm women, local histories, autobiographies of pioneer women such as those of Kathleen Strange (1937), Peggy Holmes (1981) and Nellie McClung (1935), compilations of pioneer accounts such as Rasmussen (1976), Ewanchuck (1977 and 1981), and Robertson (1974), and a compilation of recollections of Red River Settlement women by Healy (1923). Major secondary sources were Ellis (1971), Morton (1967), Friesen (1984), Kohl (1976), Ross (1985), Giangrande (1985), Cowan (1983), the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Series and several statistical studies: Koski (1982), CRDC (1979), Ireland (1983), Smith (1987) and Berry (1986).

Research methods were exclusively qualitative. There is already an array of relevant statistical studies available. While statistical studies are valuable as means of testing for representativity of findings, they harbour some important disadvantages. For example, they do not always provide a full picture. They lift women's activities out of their particular

socio-economic context, thereby obscuring their specific economic function. For example, the importance of small-scale buffering activities is overlooked because they are not seen in the context in which they occur. Moreover, quantitative methods are relatively inflexible. They address questions in a directed way which tend to reveal only those aspects of women's work of which researchers have some prior knowledge. For example, instead of examining all facets of women's work processes they tend to focus on single tasks, like those labelled "milking" and "livestock care". Finally, statistical studies attempt to identify correlations between variables but they often provide only 'snapshots' of conditions at one point in time.

In contrast, qualitative research methods, especially the use of open-ended questions in face-to-face interviews allowed me to explore nuances and novel facets of women's work of which I had not been aware, thus supplementing existing statistical studies. They also allowed me to study women's work within the historical, socio-economic setting of farms, rural communities and the larger society, thus revealing the conditions under which gender roles are moulded over the long-term. Nevertheless, statistical studies provided valuable references with which my data could be compared and a basis for developing an initial list of interview questions.

The material presented does not pretend to be representative of Manitoba farm women in a statistically valid sense. However, representativity is enhanced by the intentional effort to

interview farm women from diverse ethnic backgrounds and geographical locations. It should be noted that the analysis given in this thesis focuses not so much on ethnic variability but on ecological and economic variability. A more in-depth study of ethnic variability would require a far greater investment in participant observation, interviews and the study of conditions in homelands. It should also be noted that geographical representativity is concentrated largely in the area south of Lake Winnipeg to the U.S. border and west of Steinbach to the Saskatchewan border including the area south of the Riding Mountains.

Representativity was further enhanced by the manner in which contact was sought. I used the "informant-referral method" (Beck, 1970:16). Nine independent sources of farm women's names were drawn on to contact interviewees. Of these sources, several provided names of interviewees who, in turn, named several more interviewees. In this way, branch lines of informants were developed, avoiding the predominance of members from one area of the province or one organization (like the Women's Institute, the Keystone Agricultural Producers or the National Farmers Union). This reduced the potential for biased accounts. I was helped at times by informants who were well known in the region and who acted as intermediaries in introducing me to new interviewees. Some of these interviewees acted as "key informants". They were particularly knowledgeable about the array of research questions and were able to transcend their own personal life experiences to

reflect on historical trends and larger socio-economic conditions.

A danger inherent in the informant-referral method is that interviewees may be biased in their choice of individuals to whom the researcher is referred. Informants may suggest others who are particularly articulate or who share similar views. In coping with such sources of bias, the importance of comparing quantitative studies with qualitative studies becomes especially evident. Given the potential for convincing but biased accounts, the validity of information gathered in this study was assessed by cross-referencing using several sources. For example, information derived from interviews was compared for consistency with that derived from other interviews as well as film accounts, local histories and secondary sources.

Interviews were carried out between 1985 and the present with about one hundred and thirty farm women and men of which seventy-one were in-depth interviews. A checklist of questions was employed which covered a range of issues including family and ethnic background, farm activities, domestic activities, views on the farm crisis and involvement in community affairs. Specific questions were asked depending on characteristics of the interviewees, for example age, or whether they had off-farm jobs. I asked all interviewees about their mother's or daughter's activities in farming to highlight changes from generation to generation.



The intent was to expose as many facets of farm women's activities as possible so open-ended or non-directive\* questions were commonly asked. Specific, directive questions needed to be asked, however, to gain specific information on work processes and the like. In some cases, too, a directive approach was called for because, as one interviewee shyly pointed out, "I'm not used to talking about myself" (F.K. personal communication\*\*). Questions which tended to lead interviewees to answer in a way suggested by the questions themselves were avoided.

Follow-up interviews were undertaken as I became aware of gaps in information and nuances which should be explored further. For example, when I began to see a link between a downturn in the farm economy and intensified efforts on the part of women to make ends meet through a variety of economizing and income-generating activities, I arranged a new round of interviews on the 1930's to further explore the validity of this link.

Group interviews were particularly useful in gaining more information on the past. In a group situation, interviewees triggered each other's memories. Mnemonic devices like photographs, references to an anecdote in a local history or references to equipment used in the past (like a cream separator or binder) were also used. At times, interviewees brought out their own photo albums to highlight various aspects of their work

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\* For a discussion on the non-directive approach to interviewing see Whyte (1960:352-356) and Aarden (1972:83-88).

\*\* Hereafter (p.c.)

or the tools and living arrangements which they experienced.

One difficulty encountered during interviews on occasion was the presence of husbands who were overbearing. Despite occasional difficulties, however, most husbands who were present at interviews became valuable informants, particularly in regard to explaining past and present conditions in farming. Another difficulty encountered was that women were often working during the interview; cooking or looking after small children who frequently interrupted the conversation. Often farm women's busy schedules also made it difficult to arrange interviews. Occasionally, women could only accomodate me late at night. This is, in part, a result of the fact that I conducted many of the interviews during or shortly after harvest time which is the busiest time of the year. It should be noted, however, that while these difficulties placed constraints on interviewing, they also helped me gain better insight into the lives of farm women. Furthermore, interviewing during the peak season probably enhanced farm women's ability to articulate their answers on work activities.

Interviews were generally recorded using a tape recorder. In instances where using a tape recorder was not possible due to circumstances, notes were taken immediately after the interview. I avoided note-taking during interviews because I was concerned that it might interfere with the interview process, leaving me too little time to process answers and formulate questions.

Both tape-recording and note-taking after the interview permitted accurate documenting of interviews. Transcribing tape recordings was hindered, in some instances, by household noises like the clanging of pots and pans and talking by other household members but it had the advantage of verbatim accounts. In addition, tape-recorded interviews allowed me to evaluate my interview style.

I put great effort into treating the interview as a casual conversation which, as I quickly found out, enhanced the informant's willingness to speak openly thus making the interview more informative. I usually opened the interview with unrelated, non-threatening subjects, and I minimized the use of a list of questions by memorizing the aspects of farm women's work that I wanted to talk about. My foreign background was an asset in that it helped me build rapport more quickly. In general, interviewees became comfortable with the use of a tape recorder as the rapport grew.

Additional information beyond interview notes was gained from noting non-verbal behavior and characteristics of the house and farmyard. Staying overnight with farm families helped me develop an understanding of their life. In addition, I engaged in short periods of participant observation which allowed me to become acquainted with farm machinery and observe gender roles in haying and grain harvesting. Other field events that enhanced my understanding of farm life were visits to the Brandon Farmer's Market, dairy and cow/calf operations and the agricultural museum

in Austin, Manitoba at the time of the Threshermen's Reunion. This last event, in particular, helped me become acquainted with past farm and domestic technology and living conditions as well as women's domestic activities like quilting, sewing of articles using flour bags and baking in outdoor ovens. Visits to the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature and the Grey Nuns Museum in Winnipeg, and to the Mennonite Museum in Steinbach, Manitoba helped me become acquainted with implements used by farm women in the past, such as manual washing and sewing machines, cream separators, buttermaking equipment, cooking stoves and the like. I also participated in several conferences and meetings which focused on farm women and the general state of affairs in farming: Women's Institute Meeting, Domain, October 17, 1985; Farm Women's Meeting, Portage La Prairie March 22, 1986; Rural Studies Session, Learned Societies Conference, Winnipeg, June 4-6, 1986; "Rural Women Organizing" session, U.N. End of Decade for Women Conference, Winnipeg, September 14, 1985; "Women in Food Production in the World" Session, World Food Association Conference, Winnipeg, October 17, 1987; Manitoba Farm Women's Conference, Brandon, November 17-19, 1987; Marquis Project "Global Farm Crisis Conference", Brandon, November 28, 1987; "Goals for Canadian Agriculture Conference", Prairie Christian Training Centre, Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, January 25-27, 1988.

## Chapter III

### ERA OF SUBSISTENCE FARMING

#### 3.1 WOMEN'S WORK ON RED RIVER SETTLEMENT FARMS

##### 3.1.1 Farming in the Red River Settlement

Prior to 1870, when Manitoba became a province of the Dominion of Canada, settlement in western Canada, then called Rupert's Land, was slow. The old Red River Settlement had been established by predominantly Scottish, French Canadian and Metis farm families along the banks of the Red River, between Pembina and Lower Fort Garry, and along the banks of the Assiniboine, between Upper Fort Garry and Portage La Prairie. The farm land was located on long but narrow river lots, extending from the water fronts.

In those days, towns and urban areas did not exist and Winnipeg was merely a village of 215 inhabitants (Ellis, 1971:404). Except for the occasional sale of farm produce to the Hudson's Bay Company or private fur traders, there were virtually no domestic markets. From the perspective of the Hudson's Bay Company, which owned and governed Rupert's Land, agriculture in the Red River Settlement was subsidiary in importance. It merely existed to support the fur trade, the Company's main economic interest. Without railways, export

markets were also non-existent. Economic isolation, coupled with slow, manual methods of farming, limited Red River farm families to subsistence production, characterized by a high degree of diversity. It consisted of a combination of cereal cropping, garden production, dairying, livestock and poultry keeping and, to some extent, home production of otherwise unavailable items, all of which provided for the necessities of life such as food, shelter and clothing.

Subsistence farmsteads generally had a wide range of livestock in order to fill different needs. Based on census data for the year 1856 as compiled by Ellis (1971:48), I calculated that the average family of six kept two to three horses, eight or nine head of cattle (including both milk cows and beef cattle), about two sheep and four pigs. Most families also kept some hens and chickens.

Subsistence gardening included a wide range of vegetables. Some of the early explorers' reports of the mid-1800s indicate that various commonly used table vegetables such as turnips, beets, cabbage, asparagus, broccoli, shallots, onions and potatoes were of good quality and grown in quantity (Ellis, 1971:409). Melons and pumpkins were raised as well (Morton, 1967:85). Wheat, barley and oats generally constituted the field crops. Some settlers planted dwarf Indian corn as well, "especially", as Morton put it, "where Indian blood ran in the veins of the farmer" (1967:85). Wheat was used for making bannock, scones and dark, hard loaves of bread. Oats and barley

were primarily used as livestock feed but the Scots also used some oats for making oatcakes for their own consumption. Barley was made into barley broth which was a crucial staple in the Red River diet (Morton, 1967:87). As export markets for grain did not exist, both field and garden crops "played somewhat similar roles", since the growing of both was still determined by family needs (Ellis, 1971:403).

Wild fruit\* was another source of food. Some people also took occasional trips to Lake Manitoba to fish for whitefish. In March, some farm families made sugar from the sap of maples found in the loops of the Red and the Assiniboine (Morton, 1967:85). Another important off-farm food source was dried buffalo meat or pemmican. According to Morton (1967:87) this constituted the main meat source for most people in the Red River Settlement since they only occasionally slaughtered cattle.

### 3.1.2 Gender Roles in Red River Settlement Farming

Farm work is commonly described in terms of a seasonal round of activities involving the raising of crops. The focus is usually on activities undertaken by men.\*\* However, women's activities can also be described in terms of a seasonal round. This becomes evident in reading Women of Red River, a compilation

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\* Wild berries like saskatoons, chokecherries, pinchberries, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, cranberries and wild apples and plums are some of the most commonly used wild fruits.

\*\* For example, W.L. Morton wrote about the "farmer's year" (1967:85-88) during the Red River era which is a description of the male's seasonal round of activities.

of the recollections of women who lived in the Red River Settlement, published in 1923 by members of the Women's Canadian Club in Winnipeg (Healy,1923). As one the Red River women noted, "We had our work for each season of the year, which kept us always busy" (Healy,1923:99).

June was a busy month as a garden had to be put in. Gardening not only involved seeding and harvesting, but weeding and watering as well. Especially weeding was time-consuming. It is difficult to establish gender roles in gardening on the basis of literary sources pertaining to this period. W.L. Morton's history of Manitoba suggests that men raised the potatoes but neglects to mention who raised the other vegetables (1967:85,87).

References to garden work after 1870, in the early pioneer period, always mention the involvement of women. Archival materials on women's work on the homestead published in A Harvest Yet To Reap (Rasmussen,1976) and Salt of the Earth (Robertson,1974), include numerous autobiographical accounts on vegetable production by women. The film "Great Grand Mother", which presents a personal history of settlement based on the letters, diaries, photographs and recollections of pioneering grandmothers, gives another good representation of women's work in the garden. Evidence suggests that men and women cooperated in gardening on subsistence farms. For example, a woman writing in 1904, recalled her first days on the homestead with her husband:



I remember we were eager for a garden. As soon as a little bit of land was broken we planted peas, beans, radishes, lettuce, etc. (published in Robertson, 1974:28).

Since the early pioneer period represented, in many ways, a continuation of the type of subsistence farming established in the Red River Settlement, women were probably heavily involved in gardening in the Red River era as well.

Next in the cycle of seasonal activities came haying. This usually took place in July and August. Several anecdotes in Women of Red River include statements on female participation in haying, particularly in raking and stacking hay where this occurred on the 'hay privilege'\* within the immediate vicinity of the farm. For example:

The girls used to go out with the boys to the hay meadows ... and help in gathering up the hay. We had home-made rakes. We carried the hay to the stacks on poles, and after the stack was up we laid branches of trees over it so the wind would not blow the hay away before it settled down and became solid (Healy, 1923:119).

Late one Thursday afternoon he was drawing hay. His wife was up on a high hay stack and he was pitching the hay up to her (Healy, 1923:86).

Hay cutting itself appears to have been done by the men, especially when it involved week-long stays off the farmstead. This usually occurred in late July or early August when the men went out to cut extra hay on the open plains.

Before the day fixed for the beginning of hay cutting each year, the best hay meadows were spied out, and each man had planned where he was to cut hay ... The

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\* Behind each Red River farm was a hayfield which was two miles long. Only the family living on the river-front lot could cut hay on this 'hay privilege' (Morton, 1967:86).

men went out and camped on the prairie in tents, riding home every Saturday evening for the Sunday (Healy, 1923:150).

Barry Kaye, the author of an article on haying in the Red River era (1984:1-11), has given the impression that haying was an exclusively male enterprise even though he referred to Women of Red River three times. Where he does mention women, he places them in the general category of "family labour":

The quantity of hay each settler [male] could harvest was severely limited by the shortage of hired labour. A few Indians from the Indian settlement of St. Peter's sometimes hired themselves out at this busy time but haying was essentially a family affair in which both women and youngsters regularly took part (1984:8).

In a footnote Kaye adds that, according to the Nor'Wester, in 1882,

only ten percent of the farmers at Red River, consisting of men of "large means", were able to hire labour for haymaking and harvesting. The rest had to rely wholly on family labour (cited in Kaye, 1984:11).

In other words, although Kaye does not acknowledge the important role of women in haymaking, his article lends support to the argument that female participation in this work process was essential on the majority of farms. Just how essential this participation was becomes evident when the economic role of haying on Red River subsistence farms is considered.

Haying was an important subsistence activity, especially in the early years of the Red River Settlement when grain crop productivity was very low.

Some animal feed resulted from the settlement's arable farming; in good crop years a little barley and oats were used as feed, potato surpluses were sometimes used to fatten pigs and sheep, and the straw of the threshed

grain was occasionally fed to oxen. But the colonists were almost entirely dependent on the wild hay that they could bring in from the plains to feed their livestock in winter (Kaye, 1984:2).

Kaye (1984:6-7) has shown the close correlation between livestock numbers and hay quantities available to farm families in the Red River Settlement. The more hay you could harvest, the better your chances for livestock survival were and the more secure was your dairy, wool and traction supply. Hay, in other words, acted in many ways as the fuel that indirectly kept farm and family going. Therefore, the participation of all family members in haymaking should be valued equally.

Women were also indirectly involved in haymaking through facilitation, that is, carrying on the farm and household chores while the men were out haying. As early as July the men would travel to the open plains, called the "common", to start mowing. In dry years, they had to travel some sixty miles or more to get to suitable hay patches, making their stay off the farmsteads of long duration. After mowing, they

had to make numerous journeys hauling it by cart or sledge to the riverside farms ... [The] hauling of hay (and timber) was an almost daily activity of Red River livestock farmers during the winter (Kaye, 1984:9).\*

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\* Even with small numbers of livestock on each farm, a great deal of hay was needed each winter. One ox needed at least five cart-loads of hay per winter while a horse needed ten. The average family had to procure well over one hundred cart-loads (Kaye, 1984:7). These loads were hauled one at a time, taking up to twenty-four to thirty hours per trip (Nor'Wester, May 10, 1864 quoted in Kaye, 1984:9).

With the men away, women had sole responsibility for the family and farm during part of the summer and most of the winter, carrying on many of the crucial subsistence activities other than haying. Women's and men's work, therefore, was interdependent. While the men were mowing, women, with the help of children, herded the cows and sheep, weeded the gardens and performed a host of other daily tasks. In addition, they supplemented the food on the farm by gathering and preserving wild plants, herbs and fruit. As one of the Red River women recalled,

we had to preserve our berries by drying. We used to dry raspberries, saskatoons and blueberries. They would dry in a cake ... (Healy, 1923:149).

One woman described how the wild potato and the wild turnip were used in times of food shortage. Some country provisions were used for making medicine. The inner bark of the red willow was used in making a poultice for a swelling. The inner bark of the poplar was eaten as a tonic. In the early days of the Red River Settlement, a tea made from the sap of the white spruce was used for scurvy, an Indian remedy (Healy, 1923:154).

In the fall came harvesting. Men, women and children worked together once the wheat, barley and oats were ready for reaping. Several women from the Kildonan site of the Red River Settlement recounted that women had to participate in all aspects of grain harvesting:

As for work in the field in harvest time, the thing that made it necessary for those of the women who could do that work to assist was that the wheat we had then was an English white wheat with a larger berry than the wheat grown in the West today, which made good flour, but shelled very easily [sic]. A strong wind would leave a great many of the grains on the ground and in

handling the sheaves in the carts a great deal of the wheat would fall out. On account of the danger of frost and also because of the slow method of harvesting, the cutting of the wheat when it was ready to be cut had to be done as soon as possible (Healy, 1923:97 emphasis added).

A French Canadian woman recalled that:

The grain was cut with scythes and sickles. When the women helped, they used the sickles. We bound the sheaves with willow; we were careful not to lose, or waste, any of the precious grain (Healy, 1923:118).

Women's participation in harvesting was essential given the technological and environmental conditions under which harvesting occurred and the biological tendency of wheat to shatter easily. General historical works like W.L. Morton's Manitoba: A History, have overlooked this crucial role of Red River farm women in reaping grain. Women are generally portrayed as 'field aids' to their husbands, as in this quote by Morton.

[When] the reapers moved into the parks with their sickles and scythes ... the women and children followed, raking, binding, and stooking ... (1967:87).

The fact that it was a common sight to see women reaping the grain is indicated by the remarks of one of the first Grey Nuns to arrive in the Red River Settlement:

In the next summer when it was harvest time and the sisters were out cutting the wheat by hand in our field next to the convent, working like the other women in the settlement who helped in the harvest ... (Healy, 1923:110).

For the women, field work was an extra chore. It was added to their other work in the home and with the livestock in the barnyard. Autumn, therefore, must have been an especially busy season. One Red River woman pointed out that:

When we worked in the fields there was always a great deal to be done in the evening after the field work was over. The milk had to be attended to and the skim milk fed to the calves and the butter churned (Healy, 1923:100).

In addition:

In the fall, after the slaughtering, there was a great deal of work to be done in making blood puddings and white puddings and in boiling and drying tripe and getting our whole winter's supply of meat ready (Healy, 1923:100).

Women's work in harvesting garden crops and preserving the produce also coincided with harvest time in the grain fields.

In the late fall and during part of the winter, grain had to be threshed, winnowed and, in the case of wheat, ground. Morton wrote:

Threshing was done by flail on the barn floor; where one was lacking, on an ice floor; the grain was winnowed and sifted in the open air, and stored for grinding or for seed ... The wheat when threshed had still to be ground. In the early days hand mills had been used, and had to be kept as standbys, for times when roads were blocked, or wind or water [for the operation of the mills] failed (1967:87).

The personal recollections of Red River women provide us with insight into the gender roles in the grain-processing work process. With respect to threshing and winnowing, it is recorded that,

We all used to get up very early, and the men would go out to the barns to thresh with a flail ... (Healy, 1923:147).

Among the winter nights' occupations for the girls, ... was "knocking barley". The barley was put in the hollowed, bowl-like block of wood which was used for this purpose, and the girls would take turns, some in pounding it with a long-headed wooden mallet with a stick or a long-handled spoon. When the grain was all separated from the hulls it was winnowed, and was then ready for use in making barley broth (Healy, 1923:149).

With respect to grinding the wheat, the editor of Women of Red River, Healy, noted the use of the

quern, the ancient form of mill for grinding wheat; it consists of two round stones. The upper stone is ground round by hand upon the fixed nether stone. Jesus had it in mind when he said: "Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left". The women of Kildonan ground thus at the mill, in the time before there were windmills in the settlement; and the quern was often in use even after there were windmills (1923:152).

After grinding came bolting (sifting), about which a Red River woman recalled:

[For] many years the windmills were the only mills. Sometimes there would be a breeze strong enough to give them power to grind, but not to bolt ... When we had to do the bolting ourselves we used to do it with a sieve of brass wire which we would hang from a beam and spread a white cloth under it on a table, then by pouring in the ground but unbolted grist we had brought from the mill and shaking the sieve we would get flour (Healy, 1923:153).

In the winter, the work process involving the manufacture of cloth and clothing kept women busy.\* From the stories of Red River women it appears that the preparation of wool for clothmaking was done in the winter evenings. One woman recalled that, when she was young, the girls had to tease wool after school in the afternoon. This wool was later carded by the women. (Healy, 193:146-147). Spinning, knitting, weaving and sewing came next. Most of the clothes and blankets were made out of homespun

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\* In the Red River Settlement, the work process involving the manufacture of cloth and clothing started with taking care of the sheep which provided wool, the raw material. A Red River woman recalled that one of the chores done by girls every morning before school was feeding the farm animals (Healy, 1923:147). In summertime, when the sheep were out in the pasture, one of the evening chores was bringing the sheep home (Healy, 1923:104). Women were also involved in sheep shearing in June.

cloth. Mrs. Good, who was eighty-three at the time of the interview in 1923, described the steps involved in making blankets:

We used to get sturgeon oil from the Indians in birch bark rogans and put it in the wool to make it work easier ... and then when the blankets were made we had to wash the oil out of the wool. We used to have an enormous tub into which we put the blankets and soap and water and the girls would get in in their bare feet and tread on the blankets, and when that had been done long enough the girls would put on their stockings and shoes and then the boys would wring the blankets out (Healy, 1923:101).

The manufacture of clothing by women also included shoemaking, as the following quote illustrates:

Every article I wore was the product of my mother's hands, even my shoes, until I was fourteen or fifteen years old, when I got my first bought shoes ... (Healy, 1923:100).

Boots were made from tanned cattle hides. Buffalo or cattle sinew was used to stitch together the cut-out leather. Women tanned the leather themselves using willow bark and a tanning tub which was usually an old, dug-out tree (Healy, 1923:100).

Women's care of clothing did not end with the manufacture of cloth and clothing, that is, spinning, weaving, knitting and sewing. The clothing work process also included garment maintenance. This was done through mending, laundering and ironing, which were not season-specific but were carried out when needed. The sources which I have consulted for the Red River era do not include explicit references to these three activities. Therefore, it is not quite clear to what extent they were carried



out. The comparatively greater durability of homespun materials may have reduced the frequency with which women had to mend. However, despite greater durability, garments were subjected to rough handling on the farmsteads. In addition, since Red River families were large, some having well over ten children, the pile of garments to be mended must have grown proportionally to the number of children in the family.

With respect to laundering in the Red River era, the absence of explicit statements in Women of Red River may indicate that these women washed clothes less often than their later counterparts. Cowan has suggested that:

Prior to industrialization, much of the clothing that people wore was virtually unwashable: the woven woolen goods, the alpacas and felts and leathers of which outer clothing was made, were cleaned by brushing; and the linen or knitted wools of which underclothing was composed, although potentially washable, were in fact rarely laundered (1983:65).

Homespun materials, it seems, not only needed less mending than the factory-produced textiles of later years like cotton but less laundering as well.

Very prosperous Red River farm families acquired part of their clothing materials from the Hudson's Bay Company store. A few families received packages of textiles from family overseas. These fabrics were often lighter and easier to wash and were, perhaps, more frequently laundered by women.

Laundering was a demanding work process. It involved the heavy tasks of fetching water from an outdoor source using pails

and getting fuel for the wood stove in order to heat the water.

It also involved several other tasks as the following description by Alberta pioneer, Kathleen Strange, of the early 1900s shows.

Washing! What a job that always was. Usually it took me the entire day ... The boiling, sudsy water had to be carried in pails from the stove to wherever my tubs were set. More than once I burned myself severely, spilling water on unprotected hands and legs ... At the beginning I had washed by hand, rubbing laboriously on a board and earning for myself a frightful backache at the end of each dreaded washday ... Drying the clothes was almost as much of a job as washing them, especially in winter. It often took the best part of a week, and for many months during the year, when the weather was cold, the various rooms of our house were made uncomfortable and unpleasant with smelly underwear and clumsy flannel shirts which took not hours but days to air thoroughly (Strange, 1937:220-222).

Without the use of bleach, laundering was extra cumbersome as "the whitest wash was achieved by setting the undies to simmer on the back burner" (Corrective Collective, 1974:49).

Soap for laundering was not readily available and had to be made from scratch. Soapmaking was a work process in itself which included the preparation of beef fat and ashes. It had to be performed with great care as the following description by (McClung, 1935:33) suggests.

The leach was a small barrel of ashes, set up on a trestle, high enough to cover a black iron pan. The barrel had small auger holes bored in the bottom, and the innumerable pails of water poured on the ashes would at last run through in reluctant black drops, and then the leach was said to be running. The lye thus extracted was used for making soap, and the day the soap was made was a day of high adventure. The operation took place outside in a big black kettle that was never used for anything else. No ordinary day would do; it had to be a clear bright day with no wind, and the moon had to be on the increase or the soap might not set. Over a blazing fire, made in a hole lined with stones, the grease and lye were fused in the old black pot and stirred all the time, from left to

right, with a hickory stick. They used beef grease to make the soap soft ... There was a fascination in the fiery boiling of this billowy mass, threatening every minute to boil over. My mother, in a sprigged blue print dress, tucked tightly between her knees and her head rolled in a red handkerchief stood on the windward side, stirring with a quick motion. Wooden boxes stood ready to receive the soap when it was done. No one must speak to her or interrupt in any way when the boiling was going on, for there was a moment when the pot must be removed and if that moment were correctly guessed the soap would harden. My mother was the High Priestess of all domestic rites to me, so of course she knew the exact moment.

Starch for pressing clothing was made from scratch as well, as the following quote from Women of Red River illustrates.

We made our own starch from potatoes. We used to grind the potatoes and press them through a straining cloth stretched over a tub half filled with water, and let the starch settle. We put indigo in the starch for laundry use. We used to make starch for puddings separately (Healy, 1923:99).

Ironing was an additional aspect of the laundering work process. Several Red River women recalled the frills on their mitches (headwear) which they used to iron with a special iron called the "Italian" iron (Healy, 1923:99). Having no electricity, the stove functioned as heat source. Ironing, therefore, involved the additional task of maintaining a hot wood stove.

A number of work processes which were performed by women have not yet been mentioned. Like mending, laundering or ironing, these work processes were not season-specific but were carried out on a daily or weekly basis, throughout the year. One was child care, a twenty-four hour responsibility. Children had to

be dressed, bathed, fed and socialized. Since families were big, there was a lot of work involved. Without disposable baby bottles and diapers, prepared baby foods, running water, or washing machines, baby care in particular was labour-intensive. This is illustrated in the book Never Done: Three Centuries of Women's Work in Canada (Corrective Collective, 1974:33):

Mothers would naturally breastfeed their babies, if they could. If they were unable to produce enough milk, they would have to substitute animal milk, since wet nurses were not common. In the days before disposable baby bottles, animal horns and bottles with wash leather nipples were used. Rubber nipples did not appear until mid century.

Once the baby began to eat solid food there was the additional job of preparing special baby food. This involved long hours of boiling grain or oatmeal, followed by drying, sifting and boiling again (1974:33). In addition, the baby's napkins and diapers, as well as those of two or three year old toddlers, added volume to the laundry work process.

Preparing breakfasts and lunches, cooking dinners and washing dishes were other daily routines. So were milking and livestock care:

The girls had chores to do every evening and every morning, too, before school. We all used to get up very early ... and the girls would help in milking the cows and feeding them, and in feeding the calves and pigs (Healy, 1923:147).

A Red River woman noted some of the different tasks involved in the milking work process:

We were up at five ... and attended to the milk which had been left standing overnight in the milk coolers. They were wooden pans made of oak each with two handles. Every morning we washed them first with cold

water, and then with warm water, using a strong home-made willow brush, and last with boiling water. Then we set them to air, ready for the evening. We used to have two sets of coolers (Healy, 1923:96-97).

Considering that water had to be fetched from an outside source and the stove heated up for the second and third rinsing, the cleaning of wooden milk coolers was not easy. It is not surprising that the introduction of tin pans was welcomed, as is evident by the following statement of a Red River woman:

It was not until the Company began to make tin pans at York Factory that our work was made very much easier for us by the use of tin pans, which were so much easier to clean instead of the old oak coolers (Healy, 1923:96).

Milk was used for drinking and making butter and cheese. Butter- and cheesemaking were weekly chores. Buttermaking was a time-consuming and laborious work process as the following descriptions by informants illustrate.

For buttermaking you used sour cream and churned it until it curdled. The children did it [churning] once a week. It takes about one hour but the time depends on the cream and how warm it is. The churn was a broomstick with cross-piece boards that were worked up and down in the churn ... Buttermaking takes time, depending on many things like the temperature of the cream, the sourness of the cream, whether there is still some milk in the cream, like if it was creamed off badly, and the size of the churn. Also, the thicker the cream, the faster it would go. Old country cream had higher butter fat (Winnipeg group interview, p.c.).

[After you have churned the cream into butter] you work the butter. You drain the buttermilk out. You wash it [the butter], so you put very cold water in the butter and you had to work it and it [the butter] got very solid. You drained that water again. Then, you had to work that butter to get all the water out because water will spoil the butter. We used butter-paddles for that. The butter was at one end of the tub and you

pressed the water out and the butter [simultaneously] to the other end [of the tub]. Then, you threw out the water. That was repeated five or six times; as long as you saw bubbles of water in the butter. That would take half an hour or three quarters of an hour, depending on the amount of butter you had to do (H.C.p.c.).

You sprinkle in some salt and rework it [the butter] after the salt had had a chance to dissolve. I always used wooden bowls and butter-ladles (F.D.p.c.).

These quotes show the different yet interrelated tasks involved in making butter.

Like the buttermaking work process, cheesemaking required skill and specialized knowledge. Red River women recalled making cheese "on Saturday, using the rennet which we prepared from the stomachs of calves" (Healy, 1923:100). Red River farm women probably also made cottage cheese. R.N., an older informant, related that the production of cottage cheese "needs patience and timing; when it is heated too much it will curdle and get hard". She also said that cheese making "took alot of time" (R.N.p.c.). The cottage cheese work process was described to me in the following way.

We made cheese out of milk. You put it to sour and then put it on the stove and heat it up. What we used to do with cottage cheese; we put the cheese in a bag, let it drip off and then work at it and then add cream. That made it very delicious. Then we used to pack it in wooden pails. We made a few pails for the winter (O.L.p.c.).

Milk, butter and cheese, provided largely by women, were crucial dietary supplements in Red River households. With the exception of butter, they were protein-rich foods and supplied

high-quality animal protein without actually killing any precious livestock. Moreover, women bartered dairy products at the Hudson's Bay store for household necessities and farm supplies. Just how important dairy products were to Red River settlers is demonstrated by the fact that, upon marriage, a cow or heifer was given to the bride (see, for example, Healy, 1923:105).

Like butter and cheese production, baking and house cleaning were work processes carried out on a weekly basis. Another work process carried out by women on a regular basis throughout the year was candlemaking. This involved the preparation of tallow on a hot stove.

Apart from their work in the domestic economy of Red River farmsteads, women played a major role in community life as well. At weddings, dances, fairs and other social events women were generally responsible for the provision of food (Healy, 1923:210-211). Women helped each other out in times of illness and childbirth. Several Red River women were also quite active in educational, church and charitable activities. Some were teachers, some were in the church choir and some were active in the St. Boniface orphanage and hospital (Healy, 1923).

### 3.1.3 Conclusion

Women's work was crucial to daily subsistence and general social well-being in the Red River Settlement. Their farmsteading activities prior to 1870 encompassed reaping, raking

and stooking grain; grinding and bolting wheat; 'knocking' barley; raking and stacking hay; gardening; preserving vegetables and meat; gathering and preserving wild fruit; care of livestock; dairying; manufacture and maintenance of cloth and clothing; manufacture of soap, starch, rennet, sugar, medicine and candles; preparation of all daily meals; baking; child care; and house cleaning.

The value of describing women's work within the context of work processes has been demonstrated. In the case of the clothing work process, for example, all steps involved in making and maintaining cloth and clothes were considered rather than subsuming these steps under the general designation of sewing.

The concept of work process articulates women's roles in Red River farming even better when embedded in an analysis of both gender roles against the background of existing ecological and economic conditions. This was exemplified by women's work in reaping grain and making hay. In the case of reaping grain, both men and women did the cutting -- a necessity given the danger of frost, the early shattering of ripe grain and the slow method of harvesting. With haying, too, men and women needed to cooperate in order to take advantage of optimal conditions. Waiting too long with cutting could seriously threaten the supply of this crucial resource. Hot, dry weather resulted in inferior hay. Wind, hail and prairie fires could seriously damage dispersed hay, making rapid raking and stacking important. This often necessitated women's direct and indirect participation in



haymaking. Based on this analysis, I conclude that the ecology of Red River subsistence farming called forth a sexual division of labour in which men and women were responsible for different work processes that complemented each other but in which a high degree of task sharing took place.

Dairying, food preservation, clothmaking and many of the other subsistence work processes carried out by women on Red River farmsteads, complemented those for which men were responsible such as field-crop production, haymaking, construction of barns and fences, making of tools and so on. Together, the carrying out of all these work processes made life on subsistence farms possible.

The complementary nature of men's and women's work on the farm reflects their mutual dependence and was exemplified by women's indirect involvement in haymaking, that is, carrying on the farm and family while men are out haying.

Reaping grain and stacking hay by both men and women are examples of task sharing within certain, gender-specific work processes. Men and women probably also cooperated in gardening and, when not hauling hay, men may have assisted women with milking. Examples of task sharing are also found in livestock care and carrying water and wood.

### 3.2 WOMEN'S WORK ON PIONEER FARMS

#### 3.2.1 Settling On The Frontier After 1870

In 1867, the Dominion of Canada was established through the British North America Act, thereby initiating the process of Canadian Confederation. Rupert's Land was to be annexed to eastern Canada. On July 15, 1870, Manitoba became a province of the new Dominion. The destiny of the prairies was determined before they became Canadian provinces.

The millions of acres of western real estate were expected to serve the interests of 'old Canada', in the view of those who lived east of Lake Superior ... Because previous economic booms had accompanied the expansion of agricultural settlement, they planned to establish a new 'investment frontier' that would open the west and enrich the east in one fell swoop. Their hopes lay with the pioneer farmer who, far from being the self-sufficient recluse of folk-tales, would initiate an economic take-off by buying lumber, groceries, and agricultural implements, on the one hand, and shipping grain and livestock, on the other (Friesen, 1984:162).

The federal government of Sir John A. MacDonald devised a 'National Policy' to ensure this profitable development of the West. Federal policy on settlement affected agricultural development and therefore gender roles in prairie farming. In an effort to encourage settlement, the homestead system was adopted in 1872 under the Dominion Lands Act (Martin, 1938:394), which meant that settlers received a 160-acre homestead for ten dollars. By 'proving up' the homestead within three years, they could clear the title and own the land.\* Government regulations

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\* Historians have generally overlooked the fact that women could not qualify for a homestead in their own name.

Unlike the United States, Canada did not open

stated that, to 'prove up' the homestead, thirty acres of land had to be broken and a house worth three hundred dollars or more had to be built within three years (Friesen,1984:306).

### 3.2.2 Farming on the Frontier

The first few years on the homestead meant hard work. Especially in the pre-railway era from 1870 to 1881, pioneer families had to make a living with very little outside help. Local service centers such as towns and country stores did not exist at first, compelling people to be largely self-sufficient through mixed farming. As in the pre-1870 Red River Settlement era, inaccessibility to export markets and absence of domestic markets limited pioneers to subsistence farming (Ellis,1971:617). Ecological factors, too, kept prairie farming within subsistence limits initially. The early pioneers were not familiar with the environmental, especially climatic conditions they were up against (Friesen,1984:302). The heavy clay and tough sod of the Red River Valley proved to be too much for their ploughs and, like the farm families of the Red River Settlement, they

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homesteads to wives or single women. Only if she were the head of a household could a woman, like any male over eighteen, earn title to a quarter section of land by farming it. A wife or daughter might toil alongside her menfolk, contributing equally to the fulfillment of the homestead requirements, but in the end, the men owned the land (Rasmussen,1976:148).

Women were legally defined as dependents. They owned no property and had no income according to the legal system. Their livelihood was therefore necessarily embedded within wifehood. Wifehood usually meant motherhood and thus population growth. This is what the Dominion government wanted to achieve: As one immigration commissioner put it, "It is not independent women we want but rather population" (Great Grandmother).

struggled with a short growing season given the slow maturation rate of their wheat.

Their predominantly manual farm technology resembled that of the early Red River Settlement farm families as well. Traction power for plow and cart were, as before, provided by slow-moving oxen. Haying continued to be done, initially, by scything and hand raking, although mechanical mowers and rakes were soon introduced (Morton, 1967:164). The grain-harvesting process resembled pre-1870 routines as well. There were very few mechanical reapers around, so the scythe and cradle remained in use. Grain sheaves were still bound and stooked by hand and then hauled by cart to the barn. Some farm families had a threshing machine that ran on horse-power but, in the newer settlements, the flail was still in use and winnowing was done when the wind was right (Morton, 1967:165).

### 3.2.3 Gender Roles in Pioneer Farming

The economic and ecological conditions of farming on the frontier called forth a similar sexual division of labour as had characterized subsistence farming in the Red River Settlement. The daily, weekly and seasonal farm activities of pioneer women arriving after 1870 resembled those of their Red River Settlement counterparts. However, an additional factor in farming on the frontier was the extra challenge of establishing a farm and community. Under conditions of extreme social and economic isolation and with only three years to prove up the homestead,

pioneer women were heavily involved in the breaking of land for cultivation and the construction of homes, barns, fences and wells -- all traditionally male gender-specific work processes. In some cases, the men of the family arrived earlier than women and children and these work processes were well underway by the time the women and children arrived. But more often than not, families arrived together. Settlements were too sparse for neighbouring men to organize land-breaking and construction bees. Furthermore, hired help was not yet available and young families lacked able-bodied sons. Therefore, task sharing between men and women was imperative for family and homestead survival.

#### 3.2.4 Task Sharing In Clearing and Breaking Land

Immediately upon arrival, settlers cleared and broke land for a vegetable garden in order to secure a supply of food. F.G., whose parents were pioneers, commented:

We grew everything. Peas, beets, potatoes, cabbage, corn, turnips, tomatoes, carrots and onions. If we wouldn't have grown our garden, we wouldn't have eat. Definitely not (F.G.p.c.).

The degree of difficulty in breaking land depended on the area in which one settled. Heavily-wooded soils were harder to break than prairie sod, demanding heavy participation by women. R.N., whose parents settled on the wooded slopes of the Riding Mountains, noted:

There was nothing but bush. All we saw was the sky ... Men and women, they all worked together. Clearing the land was done with horses and oxen. They [horses and oxen] were on a stump and pulled and pulled. And the women used to pick up the wood and throw it on piles.

Coming home, mother used to be black from burning wood (R.N.p.c.).

R.T. from the same area recalled:

When they [parents] came to Canada, the first thing they did was breaking and planting a garden together. They broke it together, but after that mother did all the garden work. We [lived on] potatoes and vegetables and faith in God (R.T.p.c.).

R.T. babysat her siblings while her parents were clearing land using a pick for digging out roots and "at night mother came home with blood running down her hands" (R.T.p.c.). An interviewee in Great Grandmother recounted:

The women worked just as hard as the men. The men would dig around the trees and then the women would pull them out with a rope around their waist and the tree ...

### 3.2.5 Task Sharing in Construction

The autobiographical novel of Alberta pioneer woman Peggy Holmes describes how she and her husband Harry established a farm under frontier conditions. With respect to construction activities, Holmes wrote:

We drew up yards of plans for the log house, barns, chickenhouse, pig pens, well site, vegetable garden, flower garden, fences ... [We] decided to begin digging our own well on the spot where I had predicted water would be found. With bucket and shovel, rope and pulley, plus our two pairs of hands, the first feet down were not too difficult ... I as foreman-helper was instructed to haul up the full buckets of clay, empty them and return them ... (1980:79-83).

While Harry was building pole corrals and shelter for stock, I was peeling logs ... With a two-handled drawknife you sit astride a log and peel off its bark. You have to keep rolling the logs. Harry [sawed the logs] with a one-man cross-cut saw, chopping the corners with an axe ... [Constructing the walls of our home necessitated the use of ropes which had to] go

under a log and over the wall, with me on the other side of the building driving Skin and Grief [two horses] which were hooked on to the ropes. Harry would yell to me, "Git up" and, "Whoa", and guide the log into its place ... [We] laid the floor as quickly as possible, much to the detriment of our knees. Housemaid's knee is painful, and we both had it! ... We whipped up temporary shelters for chickens, and a log barn which was a gift from another desperate character on his way out. These logs were numbered and hauled over ... The next task was the chinking, which posed another problem as the ground was frozen ... so with hod and trowel I stole into the barn and waited for material [cow dung] to be delivered, then dashed back into the house and whipped up a dollop. Everyday I collected my material and worked on the four walls (1980:100-103).

Peggy Holmes was also involved in digging a cellar under the house and thatching the roof.

Holmes' autobiography also illustrates the pressures created by government regulations on proving up the homestead, necessitating task sharing by men and women in making improvements.

[Towards the end of the three year prove up period] Harry was on the last pull of the line fence, another half mile to go on our south boundary. We had to get this finished or the land would not be ours ... I went out to help Harry complete the fencing and [worked] feverishly against time ... We had just finished - and had proved up at last ... (1980:186).

Isolation and hard work with simple, often self-invented and self-constructed means characterized all areas of prairie settlement. In Manitoba's Interlake area for example, Ukrainian pioneers built shelters with very few and very simple tools. For lack of draft animals, women helped dragging logs from the bush to the designated building site:

[They] knew how to get along with little. A man and his wife could go into the bush with an axe and a spade

and little more and make a home for themselves (Ewanchuk, 1977:37).

After chinking the spaces between the logs with moss, "the walls of the house were plastered, outside and in" (Ewanchuk, 1977:37). Plastering walls was generally a woman's job.\* They would make a mud plaster using clay, sand, grass and water (Potrebenko, 1977:53). In addition, "The women cut reeds with sickles and bound them into sheaves which were used to thatch the roof" (Ewanchuk, 1977:32).

In the non-wooded areas of Manitoba, sod became the main building block. Some of the first Mennonite houses in southern Manitoba in the 1870s were built of sod (Blumenfeld, 1981:18). A Saskatchewan example perhaps typifies women's involvement in the construction of farm buildings using sod.

The children and I built our first sod barn. It was only 14 x 14 feet but it was necessary to have a place to put the cow. The job was hard and we did not have hardly anything to work with. We had gotten a fire guard broken and it was from this that we got the necessary sod. The two oldest children carried the sod between them on a board and I did the building. As this was an exceedingly slow way, as the poor children could not carry enough to keep me busy, I made a harness for the cow and made her help us in hauling the sod. This was a little better but as the harness was not very substantial, it was breaking continually and made things very trying. I had a job every evening of either repairing the old harness or making a new one. The utensils I had to make the sod level with consisted of an old butcher knife and the sticks which were lying around. Finally it was completed and a roof was made

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\* This was confirmed by several Ukrainian informants. For example, B.F., who was well over ninety years of age at the time of our interview and still living in the original log house on her Interlake homestead, related how she and her husband had built and plastered their home together (p.c.). O.L., whose parents pioneered on the southern slopes of the Riding Mountains, had plastered several houses in her lifetime (p.c.).



from popular poles which we managed to get out of the valley nearby (Mrs. Ed Watson Memoir, published in Robertson, 1974:44).

### 3.2.6 Conclusion

Frontier conditions demanded a high labour input from women. Carolyn E. Sachs, who did a historical study of American farm women, remarked (1983:13): "On the frontier, women were expected to work with their husbands until the homestead was established." This description applies very well to Canadian frontier women. In fact, the type of work performed by women on the frontier suggests that

there is a loosening of sex-role expectations. The requirements for survival necessitated the learning of new skills and the putting aside, or holding in abeyance, the traditional concepts of feminine behavior (Kohl, 1976:33).

The author of this excerpt, anthropologist Seena B. Kohl, who studied farm women and their families in southwestern Saskatchewan, asserted, however, that: "The loosening of sex-role definitions did not release women from their primary tasks: the maintenance of the household and the care of children" (1976:34).

Hence, women cleared, dug and built, despite their ongoing, gender-specific responsibilities for food preservation, sewing, child care and numerous domestic work processes. Even child-bearing did not stop the flow of chores that had to be done.

R.N. remarked:

Women, they were pregnant and they were helping to clear land. They just had to get home in time to have a baby (R.N.p.c.).

R.T. recalled how her mother, who was heavy with child, loaded cordwood onto a cart and took it into town by oxen. During childbirth, she said, the older children in the family carried on the chores for a while but "mother did not get much rest after childbirth" (R.T.p.c.). R.T. remembered another incident when a neighbouring woman went out into the bush to get the cows and came home with a son in her apron (p.c.). Having children and still doing chores was not easy on pioneer women. R.T. remarked that her mother had to help clear land in the bush but,

with kids every year that was hard. My mother, one day while working in the garden, sat down and cried: "My God, why did I ever come here to this mosquito land" (R.T.p.c.).

The fact that pioneer women could not take any time off for child-bearing is indicative of the high premium placed on their labour. With husbands and children already doing their share of the work on the farm, women had little choice but to resume their activities as quickly as possible after giving birth. More importantly, their particular skills in carrying out essential subsistence work processes like dairying, gardening, preserving, cooking, making clothes, soap, candles, medicine \* and so on, were indispensable given the absence of service centers and the fact that other family members did not possess full knowledge of how to successfully carry out these female gender-specific work processes from start to finish.

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\* A lot of skill and knowledge was required for making and administering medicines. A male informant, H.C., remarked:

There were no doctors around, but my mother had ways. She picked up flowers, herbs and so on for the winter, to get over colds or to kill a fever. She made her own

Families deprived of adult women due to illness and death were seriously debilitated. Even though children and husbands assisted with certain tasks such as chopping vegetables, milking, churning butter or weeding the garden, women were the ones who knew how to orchestrate these tasks and complete the work processes. They knew how to preserve the vegetables, make butter and cheese out of milk, make soap out of ash and lard, or candles out of tallow. Without this knowledge and these skills, the provision of family needs was at jeopardy. This happened in M.V.'s family. In 1936 her mother died leaving M.V., who was then twelve years old, in charge of ten younger children and the household. Although M.V. had often assisted her mother with various tasks within the soap-, candle- and clothes-making work processes, she was not qualified to carry them on independently.

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medicine. I still use a lot of those. We had a special flower on the farm that brought down fever (H.C.p.c.).

For common colds and minor injuries women used wild and cultivated plants for making salves and medicinal beverages. For example, a concoction of figs, coriander and molasses was used against constipation (Great Grand Mother). Dills and cucumber, but especially "pickled juice" were good for a cold (M.V.p.c.). Goosegrease was used as a chest salve to be rubbed on when suffering from a chest cold. Nellie McClung described one of her mother's remedies against an ear ache (1935:189):

After the ear had been washed with soap and water, a few drops of laudanum were put in, and an onion was put in the ashes to roast, and when it was well heated through, it was cautiously put on the sore ear and bandaged with a white rag.

Women were generally knowledgeable about livestock health as well. They often used the same healing methods and potions for their cattle as for nursing their children and husbands. Doctors and veterinaries were not available. Hence, women developed veterinary skills as an extension of their traditional responsibility for child care and family well-being. This is illustrated by a comment by Mrs. Mae Olstad, an Alberta pioneer:

When her mother passed away, these trades were lost to the family, making it less self-reliant and more dependent on commercial services. Fortunately, M.V.'s father could salvage home baking, having learned this from his mother (M.V.p.c.).

On the frontier it was practically impossible to compensate for the loss of one's mother's or one's wife's skills and labour with commercial goods and services. Yet, frontier conditions took a high toll on women. Women often expected a child every year. They did heavy physical work. They had little opportunity to recuperate after childbirth and had little or no professional medical care. As a result, their mortality rate was high. Archival materials, autobiographical novels and family histories indicate that remarriage was a frequently adopted solution. One pioneer woman related that "most men had two wives, as one woman usually wore out before the man did" (published in Corrective Collective, 1974:52).

The most prevalent type of remarriage was the widower-widow union. These marriages served a mutual, rather than a romantic interest. Peggy Holmes' autobiography provides the example of,

Herman Brueker, a lonely widower whose wife had died in childbirth leaving him with four young children ... Herman asked us to advertise for a wife for him ... "

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You know I was the veterinary on the farm and everything else ... He was no good at that at all and so if any animal got sick it was me (interview published in Rasmussen, 1976:54).

Similarly, R.N. from Mountain Road, told me:

I was a doctor for animals. Like when a sow got pigs, I watched them. We had eight sows. I also helped with calving.

want you folks to help me get a new missus", he announced. "It ain't no use; I can't do everything on me own, what with the kids and the chores, and feeding the stock. I've got to get me a woman ..." (1980:135-141).

Remarriage could be beneficial for both widower and widow, especially when left with young children. Frequent remarriage is strong evidence of the essential nature of the cooperation between farm women and their husbands and, particularly, of the specialized fund of knowledge held by farm women. Given the complementary sexual division of knowledge and labour, and therefore men's and women's interdependence, each regained the economic partner they had lost. Together they had all the knowledge and skills to make life on the frontier possible.

## Chapter IV

### THE PASSING OF THE PIONEER PERIOD

#### 4.1 THE TRANSITION TO COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE

As more settlers moved into Manitoba, settlements became denser and less dispersed, reducing social isolation on the frontier. Anticipation of railroad construction acted as a catalyst, quickening the pace of settlement. Towns grew in response and became local markets for farm products. Railways also made foreign markets accessible, providing an impetus for the expansion of commercial grain production. Ellis has argued that

the rapid transition from pioneer [subsistence] to traditional farming [commercial grain production combined with subsistence production] ... began with the coming of the railways ... which provided access to markets and made rapid development and expansion of agriculture possible. With access thus provided for what at the time appeared to be unlimited export markets for grain, and with restricted domestic markets for other forms of farm produce due to a limited urban population, a type of farming characteristic of Manitoba prairie farms developed and replaced the earlier pioneer types of subsistence farming (1971:619).

These "unlimited export markets" were to be found primarily in Europe.

Wheat became an important international commodity in the nineteenth century because bread became a food staple in the industrial nations of the North Atlantic world. As the decades passed, Europe's increasing preference in bread was baked from a snow white dough, high in gluten (protein), which was especially

characteristic of hard spring wheat raised on the western plains of North America. The world's largest market for wheat was England, which had a food deficit that increased sharply during the century while its rapidly growing population moved into urban centres and concentrated on industrial and commercial activities. (Friesen, 1984:327-328).

Changing ecological conditions in prairie farming enabled settlers to realize the commercial potential of wheat production. Chief among these were the changes in wheat type and field technology. A new wheat variety was developed which not only yielded more per acre but also required a shorter maturation period, making it less prone to early fall frosts. The relatively slow, manual technology with which most tasks in the fields had been carried out on Red River Settlement and pioneer farms, was gradually replaced by more sophisticated implements and methods which could do the same amount of work in less time. The broadcasting method for sowing the fields gave way to seed drills which, as a rule, were drawn by horses. Horse-drawn reapers replaced scythes and sickles in the 1880s and were replaced by binders in the 1890s (Morton, 1967:255). Binders, requiring four to six horses for their draft, incorporated an automatic binding device that tied cut grain into sheaves, thus speeding up the harvesting process considerably. Horse-drawn sulky and gang ploughs replaced the walking-ploughs of earlier times:

The gang plough with its two furrows had become the standard plough for fields now mellow with five to ten or more years of tillage [1890s]; the sulky was used for sod-breaking, while the walking-plough, the symbol of immemorial generations of agriculture, was relegated to the hard tasks of brush breaking or the simple job of ploughing the garden and the potato patch (Morton, 1967:255).

With larger grain crops, a more productive technique for detaching the grain from the straw was introduced. The threshing outfit replaced the flail. The first threshers were horse-operated outfits which were drawn along in the field from wheat stack to wheat stack and fed by hand. Steam-operated threshing machines, introduced later, were stationary and supplied by horse-drawn wagons loaded with sheaves.

#### 4.2 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY WAVES OF SETTLEMENT

While new technological systems were rapidly introduced, bolstering the trend to expanding wheat production, the adoption of these technologies was not uniform throughout Manitoba's agricultural settlement areas. Pioneers settling at different times and in different parts of Manitoba met with radically different material conditions for farm development. This affected the rate at which the transition to commercial agriculture took place.

The arable land of contemporary Manitoba was settled in two major waves. The first wave of immigrant farm families arrived in the 1870s and 1880s and settled in what can be called the "primary settlement areas". The second wave began at about the turn of the century and farmsteaded in the "secondary settlement areas".



#### 4.2.1 Farming in Primary Settlement Areas

The primary settlement areas included the grasslands and parklands of south-central and southwestern Manitoba. They were comprised of some of the best farm lands in Manitoba with the exception only of occasional pockets of poor soil. The upland plains, for example, were described as "prairie land which held neither stone nor stump to check the plough" and "deep soil to be had cheaply" (Morton, 1967:156). Much of the grasslands and parklands could be converted relatively easily into farm land (Ellis, 1971:619). Settlement was rapid on these prime farm lands.

By far the majority of first-wave settlers had British-Ontario background (Morton, 1967:156, Friesen, 1984:202). Morton wrote:

Much of the best land in southern upland Manitoba had been claimed by 1880 ... The settlers were almost wholly from Ontario, with a sprinkling of British immigrants ... Nearly all were practical farmers with means ... (1967:179).

By the end of the 1880s, the British-Ontario way of life in the parkbelt of southern Manitoba had already begun to consolidate, especially in those areas where conditions for successful settlement were favourable due to proximity to rivers and railroads (Morton, 1967:193).

The boom [of the late 1870s and early 1880s] ended the pioneer days in southern agricultural Manitoba, and confirmed the work of the first decade. It left a community established with all its essential characteristics delineated; an agricultural province; in the majority populated with a British-Ontario stock ... (Morton, 1967:203-204).

Dauphin Lake and surroundings extended the frontier of the first wave of settlers because it was not yet connected to the main east-west railway system. However, in 1896 the railway reached this area and, in combination with the deep and fertile soils of the area, agriculture soon realized its full potential here as well. Shortly thereafter, the valley of the Swan River, between the Duck and Porcupine Mountains, was settled and here, too, agriculture quickly flourished. Morton wrote:

Wood, water, and fertile land in abundance made the last of Manitoba's westward frontiers the best ... The settlers on this new frontier were almost wholly Canadian or British. Later, American settlers followed. Many of the first comers were Manitobans moving out to their second frontier to pit the skills and capital of the first against the familiar hazards (1967:276).

Morton described these settlers as "experienced landseekers, pushing into the prairie lands of the valley, family by family, with their stock and equipment" (1967:275)

Many first-wave settlers either brought their own implements with them or were financially capable of purchasing all necessary farm tools and livestock in Winnipeg, before moving onto the their farmsteads. Several local histories document the amounts of money and material possessions that some British-Ontario settlers brought along from the East. In numerous cases this was quite considerable. For example, Mrs. Proven related:

I remember coming to Minnedosa in September of 1880, being eleven days driving from Winnipeg in a covered wagon. Father, mother, eight of us and a hired man, one team of horses, one team of oxen, one pony, in a Red River cart, and 65 head of cattle and oxen [sic] (Minnedosa, 1958:147).

Many pioneer families possessed more modest resources. Nevertheless, whatever means they had could already be sufficient to generate an upward swing in the development of their farms.\*

Anglo-Saxons were not the only ethnic group among the first wave of settlers. French Canadians, Scandinavians, Icelanders, Germans, Belgians and other continental Europeans arrived as well. Among them, Mennonite settlers formed a particularly distinct group. In 1874, thousands arrived in southern Manitoba and settled on two reserves, one on the west side of the Red River and the other on the east side. As with the Anglo-Saxons, the combination of settling on good farm land and possessing some starting capital proved to be successful. Morton wrote (1967:161-162):

These simple and sturdy folk, not without suffering and heavy labour, were soon masters of their new - old environment and prosperous in self-sufficient plenty. Like the bulk of the Ontario settlers, they had been

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\* Nellie McClung's family seems fairly representative of first-wave British-Ontario settlers. Her father sold their farm, a mere "one-hundred-and-fifty stony acres" in Grey County, Ontario, and the family settled on eight hundred acres of parkland at the Sourismouth. After buying oxen, wagons and supplies in Winnipeg the family had sixteen hundred dollars left (1935:51). They were not especially rich but did, at least, have some starting capital. In addition, they had two wagonloads of "settler's effects" including "anything from a plow to a paper of pins" (1935:56). Within about three years, a fairly short period of time, Nellie McClung's father invested in a new binder, worth three hundred dollars, which was intended to replace their second-hand reaper. By that time the family owned one team of horses in addition to the oxen, and was planning on purchasing a second team in the following year (1935:127). With the new machine and faster moving horses working productive farm land, their farm could expand comparatively quickly. This particular sequence of events seems to have been fairly representative of the area where the family farmed because the author notes that her father and several neighbours purchased six binders simultaneously, collecting them in Brandon on the same day (1935:127).

well-to-do farmers in their homeland, and had a modest amount of capital.

Many Mennonites were financially capable of buying farm equipment, livestock and some basic supplies upon arrival in Manitoba. It is noted in the local history of Blumenfeld that "the first sixty-five families spent \$20,000.00 in three days, the most costly items being wagons and horses" (1981:18). In fact, this local history presents a list of Mennonite pioneers settling between 1874 and 1880 and the capital they brought along from Russia. The average family in the East Reserve was well-off and, although the settlers from the West Reserve were generally poor, a substantial loan of \$26,000.00 from Ontario Mennonites improved their overall financial position considerably (Blumenfeld, 1981:25). In addition, the Canadian government augmented the financial position of the Mennonite settlers by providing a sum of \$260,000.00 towards travelling and immigration expenses. An additional loan of \$100,000.00 was added to this to pay for food, implements and supplies. This capital helped in getting established. The local history of Blumenfeld pointed out that,

The two loans, referred to as the "Brotschuld" (debt for bread), made it possible for the Mennonite settlements to survive and to accelerate in economic growth and independence (1981:25).

As soon as the opportunity arose, Mennonite farm families mechanized their farms. The local history of Blumenfeld reported that already in 1878 reapers replaced scythes for cutting grain, soon followed by binders. Also, the first horse- and steam-

powered threshing outfits replaced the flails in 1877 (1981:139). Oxen were making room for horses and, by 1882, only one farm family still owned two oxen (1981:140). No doubt the starting capital at the disposal of the first wave of Mennonite farm families in 1874 had a multiplier effect contributing to gradually rising prosperity levels.

#### 4.2.2 Farming in Secondary Settlement Areas

The quality of the farm land, the starting capital and proximity to railroads and other roads enjoyed by farmsteads in primary settlement areas stands in sharp contrast to conditions faced by pioneers who came around the turn of the century and settled on the remaining farm land. Apart from pockets of less productive land in primary settlement areas, by and large, the only remaining areas where agriculture was possible were the Interlake, the edge of the Precambrian Shield, the southern slopes of the Riding Mountains and the slopes of the Duck and Porcupine Mountains. These areas are identified by the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Series (Dawson, 1940), by Ellis (1971), by Morton (1967), and by Ewanchuk (1977, 1981) as being less favourable farm districts.

The wooded land of the Interlake region was difficult to clear, thereby lengthening the time necessary for consolidating the farm. Some of it was unsuitable for wheat production (Ewanchuk, 1977:195). Ewanchuk asserted that the lack of roads and railways in the marshy Interlake also hindered development

(1981:112). Isolation from trading centers and grain elevators made access to supplies and markets more difficult.

In the same light, the southern slopes of the Riding Mountains were labelled a "chronic fringe" area by the researchers of the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement series.

[This] area is so handicapped by broken topography, inferior soils, and unfavorable climate that it remains a sparsely populated and marginal type of settlement after half a century of pioneering (Dawson, 1940:88).

The marginal conditions for farming in these areas discouraged the rapid development of commercial grain operations. This had implications for the rapidity with which farm families achieved prosperity.

[The] duration of the pioneer era in any district, and the rapidity with which settlements were established, were influenced by the initial productive capacity, the natural fertility, and the ease of workability of the various soils in the specific landscape areas under settlement. Where prairie soils were favorable for the production of products that could be marketed, many early pioneers ... soon climbed to personal independence and financial success. In such cases prosperous agricultural districts were established fairly rapidly, and in such districts the pioneer era under which the first settlers lived was comparatively of short duration. Under these conditions many holdings soon became well established farms ...

In other districts the local soil and natural features did not permit rapid land use development ... the natural limitations of soil and other natural features inhibited, retarded, or favored only partial conversion of virgin soil areas to productive lands. In these districts pioneer conditions persisted for longer periods of time, so that successive operators with restricted opportunities and limited resources ... were unable to acquire the affluence of those ... [in] districts where a surplus over a livelihood from the "good earth" had been easier to obtain (Ellis, 1971:617, 618; emphasis added).

Morton described the ethnic background of the people who settled in marginal, secondary settlement areas. Of the people comprising the second wave of settlers, Ukrainian immigrants were the most numerous. Morton remarked that:

Their separateness [the Ukrainians as a culturally distinct group] was intensified by the fact that the remaining homestead and cheap lands of Manitoba lay along the bushland frontier extending from the southeastern corner of the province to Lake Winnipeg, up through Interlake district, and northwestward around Lake Manitoba to the slopes of Riding and Duck Mountains. Into these rugged bushlands the new settlers went of necessity ... (Morton, 1967:309-310).

Morton mentioned that these pioneers "had come with little money" (1967:310). Friesen remarked similarly that "the Ukrainians left behind a world of poverty and carried with them little material wealth" (1984:265). They had, therefore, few resources to invest in farm development. Ewanchuk has asserted that agricultural development was also inhibited by the lack of financial support offered to these settlers.

[It] took many years before they [Ukrainian settlers] could attain the financial status of the farmers living on better lands. This situation was not due to the poorer lands alone. It was also due to the fact that they did not receive any governmental transportation and other assistance on the par with the settlers of other groups. This placed them in less favorable positions to that of the Mennonites ... (1977:23).

#### 4.2.3 Summary

The combination of settling on prime farm land and possessing some material resources enabled many first-wave settlers to expand and mechanize their farms at an early date. They

benefitted from the economic boom of the late 1870s and first half of the 1880s and were generally able to invest their financial resources into new equipment and draft animals thereby creating favourable conditions for farm consolidation, farm development and higher prosperity levels.

In contrast, East-European immigrants had relatively little starting capital and, given that they settled in less favourable areas, they were unable to quickly reach the prosperity levels of their southern neighbours. On the whole, their farms remained smaller in size and less mechanized than those of the earlier settlers. Walking-ploughs, scythes and sickles were standard field implements for most East-European settlers who could not yet afford the sophisticated equipment used on southern farms like binders and gang ploughs. Many continued to use the broadcasting method for seeding the fields and the flail for threshing the crop, while most southern farmsteads had already invested in seed drills and threshing machines and had rapidly expanded their farms. Therefore, pioneer life lingered on in secondary settlement areas calling for a sexual division of labour based on subsistence farming. The gradual specialization in commodity, field-crop production in the primary areas, on the other hand, created conditions under which changes in men's and women's work on the farm occurred.



#### 4.3 GENDER ROLES IN COMMERCIAL FARMING

The increasing focus on commercial grain production altered the scope of a variety of work processes on the farm. The most obvious change occurred in the grain-growing work process. This work process expanded enormously with dramatic consequences for gender roles in farming. By and large, women's direct participation in field-crop production declined. Conditions which contributed to women's withdrawal from field work can be called "push" and "pull factors". Push factors are those which resulted in women's displacement from field production. Pull factors are those which drew women away from field work by placing greater demands on their time in the home and barnyard.

##### 4.3.1 Push Factor: Predominance of Men in Field Work

In primary settlement areas, many established and relatively prosperous farm families expanded their grain acreage. This required more labour input, especially at threshing time. The early threshers required between four and seven people.\* Later, steam-powered threshers needed even more people for their operation. The steam thresher was driven by a belt connected to a steam tractor and people with special skills such as an engineer, tank-man, and fireman were needed to supervise the power supply to the thresher. Bandcutters, pitchers and a feeder helped supply the wheat to the threshing machine. In addition, several people were needed to lead the teams of horses that

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\* These numbers are estimated on the basis of a description by the local history of Rathwell (1970:98-99).

hauled the wheat to the thresher, and the separated grain to the granaries. A bagger-man put the grain in bags. Yet another person, a strawbucker, hauled away the straw. All in all, there could be well over twenty people involved in one threshing operation. The local history of Rathwell, for example, mentioned two threshing crews in the year 1902, one of which was made up of twenty-four people and the other one consisting of nineteen people (Rathwell, 1970:99).

Even though neighbours helped each other at harvest time, there was a general labour shortage in rural communities. To alleviate the situation, the immigration branch of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture and the railway companies cooperated to organize 'harvest excursions' after 1890 (Ellis, 1971:116). The harvest excursion trains brought thousands of men from eastern Canada to the West each year at harvest time.\* In addition, a steady labour supply became available throughout the growing season from the newly opened frontier areas in Manitoba. Adult men from East-European immigrant groups offered their labour on southern farms. Ewanchuk, in his work on the history of Ukrainian settlement in the Interlake, noted in this regard (1977:129):

Farms in the prairie area needed men to help with seeding and harvesting. Every spring saw an exodus of men from the Gimli area to work on the extra-gang crews or as section hands. Some went to work for large farmers for a period of eight months ... At first the Ukrainian farmers depended on the Mennonites for their employment, but when the Anglo-Saxon farmers learned

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\* Not until the late 1920s, with the widespread introduction of labour-saving combines, did these excursion trains stop their services.

about their skills as harvesters they went farther west where they were paid better wages ... Each summer many ... left for southwestern Manitoba to work on the harvest fields.

Similarly, his work on the history of Ukrainian settlers on the southern slopes of the Riding Mountains and on the more marginal lands to the northwest of Strathclair includes excerpts from oral histories by early pioneers who indicated having worked as threshers on farms in primary areas (Ewanchuk, 1981:41-60, 107-118).

Women's labour in the fields was gradually displaced by male labourers from the East and Manitoba's new frontier areas. In addition, after ten to twenty years of settlement, many first-generation pioneer families now had grown-up sons who began to take over their mother's share in field work.\* This development

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\* In the case of first-wave Mennonite pioneer families, women's participation in field work (and farm-improvement projects) may have been relatively low from the beginning of settlement, as a result of particular socio-economic circumstances. Mennonite families settled in Manitoba in large groups, sometimes comprising whole villages from their native country, and they quickly established their traditional communities on the frontier. Friesen pointed out that the Manitoba Mennonites of the 1870s adapted their Russian agricultural pattern of village-controlled and communally cultivated farm land to the Canadian situation (1984:267). The village-based settlement system of the Mennonites facilitated the formation of male work 'bees' to break land, build lodgings, raise barns and so on. The experience of first-wave Mennonite pioneer women, therefore, may have been different from that of the Anglo-Saxon women who pioneered under conditions of isolation on remote homesteads. It was probably also different from that of a later wave of Mennonite pioneer women who had come to Manitoba during the 1920s (Friesen, 1984:269). The village agricultural system of communally cultivated farm land had virtually disintegrated by the time they arrived (Friesen, 1984:269). Many, if not all, male work 'bees' had been dismantled and farm families were on their own to work the land unless they could afford to employ workers. Having settled in Manitoba with few assets, without the benefit of the loans their predecessors enjoyed, these second-wave Mennonite families may have relied on women's labour in the

is exemplified by Nellie McClung's family farm. Nellie McClung's father and two oldest brothers did all the field work during the growing season. They only had eighty acres of land under cultivation at first, which could be easily handled by the family's males. When this acreage expanded, more field work had to be done and, instead of enlisting the help of the family's females, they hired help (McClung:1935:218). Nellie McClung mentioned that in her farming district a total of nine men arrived as farm workers (1935:218). She also referred to large groups of men working on the farms in her area during threshing time.

The availability of male field workers affected the level of women's involvement in field tasks. On expanding farmsteads, grain production grew into an exclusively male endeavour, a trend which started before the turn of the century and continued on in the twentieth century. Interview data confirm the existence of this trend. For example, J.H. of Niverville told me that neither she nor her mother or grandmother had ever performed any field work. On the farm of her grandparents, who came to Manitoba in the 1880s and settled south of Winnipeg, field work was carried out by males only. On J.H.'s parental farm, too, field work was done by her father and three brothers during the growing season and with the help of male neighbours at threshing time. M.W. of the Miami area also related that, during the early 1900s when she

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fields. Prosperous Mennonite farm families (especially those of the first wave) like their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, however, employed male labourers to help with the work in the expanding fields, displacing women's labour.

was child, her mother and neighbouring farm women never worked in the grain fields.

In our area I don't remember any women doing fieldwork.  
Mother never worked outside (M.W.p.c.).

She added that, because the farms in her area were generally well off, women did not have to do any "outside" work. On her parental farm there was always a hired man to assist her father and brothers with the field work in spring and summertime. In the fall, "the threshing gang would come in from the East by train", and again, only males were involved in this field task (M.W.p.c.). Similarly, N.C., whose parents farmed near Russell, related: "I didn't grow up to do the manual labour [in the field] on the farm because I had three brothers" (p.c.). N.C. mentioned further that, after her marriage, when she and her husband settled on a farm near Minnedosa, her limited involvement in field work continued because her husband and his two brothers did that work. In later years, her two sons assisted in the fields (N.C.p.c.).

Similar comments about the relationship between farm prosperity, and therefore the ability to hire help, and women's field-work participation were made during interviews with women from all primary areas. There was a general consensus that women's direct involvement in field tasks depended on the availability and affordability of male help. It was only during periods of economic depression such as the 1930s and periods of war like World War II, that some of these women had been involved in field work. Several mentioned having helped with stooking and

harrowing during times of male labour shortage. Interviewee, S.S. of Rathwell remarked, for example:

You had no money. Everybody was in the same situation. During the 1930s mom and dad had it hard. The family did everything. There was no such thing as hired help. Dad was the main one to work out in the field. Mother never worked with the threshing machine in the field but she stooked out in the field. We all did (S.S.p.c.).

Other women indicated however that, despite the economic depression in the 1930s, "there was lots of help on the farm". Unemployed "citymen" worked in the fields for twenty dollars a month, an amount which was partly subsidized by the provincial government. (M.W.,J.H.p.c.). Again, even in the 1930s farm families who could afford to hire help could keep their women out of the grain fields.

Farm prosperity appears to have been a factor in the gradual displacement of women from field tasks in the United States as well. Carolyn Sachs' study of the historical and present-day role of women in American agriculture indicated that similar forces were at work. The increasing focus on commercial production in farming, accompanied by farm expansion and mechanization made the employment of field aids, usually males, both financially possible and necessary. Based on various agricultural reports and numerous rural studies covering the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Sachs concluded: "When extra help could be hired, women left the fields for the home" (1983:56).

As I have done in my own research, Sachs has tried to answer the question of how widespread the trend towards women's displacement from field tasks really was. She has argued that "middle-class" and "well-to-do" farm women rarely engaged in field work (1983:46). This argument coincides with my own research findings for Manitoba. The more prosperous farm families in the south of Manitoba not only received help at threshing time but could afford to hire labour throughout the growing season. Friesen affirmed this. At the turn of the century, he wrote, Manitoba's rural society was characterized by a social stratification.

In the top level of this hierarchy were families ... [that] possessed large farms and considerable material wealth; they were sustained by the labour of a number of male and female 'hired hands'. The next level of the hierarchy was occupied by the respectable families whose farms approximated the district average in size and who might employ one or two labourers during the growing season (1984:316).

The upper two strata, as described here, were to be found in increasing numbers in the primary settlement areas of Manitoba.

In summary, it has been established that of all the ethnic groups that settled during the early pioneer period, the British-Ontario and early Mennonite settlers were particularly distinguishable. Unlike later pioneers, they seem to have benefitted more from a favorable combination of settling on productive farm lands and having, from the start, some kind of material resources at their disposal. This, plus the advantage of early settlement in the province which allowed for a relatively long period of farm consolidation, generated a trend

toward improved standards of living which, in turn, generated a trend toward the exclusion of women from field tasks. Several factors mentioned within this scenario were the increasing mechanization of field tasks which facilitated farm expansion, commercialization and prosperity, and the availability of male harvesters from the East and from Manitoba's new frontiers. The presence of grown-up sons in older, established farm families contributed to the exclusion of women from field tasks as well.

#### 4.3.2 Pull Factor: Increased Workload in Subsistence Activities

Probably the most noticeable change in women's work on commercializing farms was a dramatic increase in the volume of subsistence and domestic work processes caused by the presence of an expanded, farm work force. Farm women usually cooked, laundered and cleaned for hired men who had board and room on the farm during the growing season. They also cooked for the threshers in the fall who, depending on the size of the crop and the weather, would stay on the farm anywhere from several days to several weeks.

A great deal of planning and labour took place long before the threshing crew arrived on the farm. Farm women had to calculate how much extra food was needed beyond family needs to feed the work crew. For example, O.L., who fed the threshers on chicken meat, related:

With all the workers and the kids you would be surprised. Two roosters and two chickens was not hardly enough a day. During threshing time we had thirteen or fourteen men for a few days and I needed a



lot of chickens to feed them. In total, we used about two hundred chickens a year (O.L.p.c.).

It is evident that the poultry-raising work process expanded in volume in response to the growing food needs on the farm. With more chickens to be raised for consumption, there was more work involved in watching the hens' behaviour to determine when they are ready to hatch eggs; collecting the eggs for redistribution to the 'clockers'; feeding the chickens; cleaning the chicken coop; monitoring the new chicks; slaughtering, plucking, dressing and, finally, preserving the meat by cutting it in small pieces, cooking it and sealing it in crocks.

Women's work in gardening increased as well. Gardening was a time-consuming work process throughout the growing season. Unlike grain production, gardening involved a host of different plant species which needed to be planted and harvested at different times. Moreover, some garden plants needed special care. Several informants remarked that watering the tomatoes, tying up the beans, thinning overgrown plants and dusting the potatoes against insects were always part of their activities in the garden. Finally, weeding was a garden task that had to be repeated several times during the growing season. With more and more people needing to be fed on the farm, gardens probably grew in size, which meant more work in preparing the soil, planting crops, weeding, watering, thinning and tying up plants and harvesting produce.

With the expansion of food-production work processes, food-preservation work processes increased in volume. Farm women tried to prepare as much meat, vegetables and baked goods as possible before the threshers arrived because they were under a lot of pressure during harvest time to get the meals ready on time. The threshing event had to run as smoothly as possible without any unnecessary delays since it was an expensive operation and there was always the threat of an early frost which could jeopardize the wheat crop and thus the farm income. It was important to "not waste a minute, for the time element was everything in threshing" (McClung, 1935:365). For farm women this meant that efficiency and punctuality in meal preparation were crucial in order to help complete the harvest as quickly as possible. Preservation of prepared foods prior to peak times was therefore necessary. Kathleen Strange, an Alberta farm woman of the 1920s, wrote, for example, (1937:225):

[The] "seasonal" work ... was ... planned as carefully as conditions would allow. For instance, in the spring I considered the question of meat supplies for the forthcoming summer months. We did not have any ice and fresh meat was always difficult to keep. So I "put down" as much as I possibly could. Before seeding commenced, I would get the men to kill a pig, or we would purchase a quarter of beef from a neighbour. This I would "can" in glass sealers. I would cut the meat into small pieces, pack it into sealers, season it, but add no water, and then process it for the given time -- some three hours or so. Pork was usually cooked and packed into crocks, then covered with boiling lard. Both these methods permitted me to place a ready-cooked meal on the table at short notice during the summer months ...

Similarly, Nellie McClung provided an example of some of the activities in vegetable canning which took place on her family's farm in anticipation of the threshing season.

It was for the threshing that sauerkraut was put up in barrels and green tomato pickles were made; red cabbage and white were chopped up with onions, vinegar, cloves and sugar, corn scraped from the cobs, and kept in stone crocks. Every sort of cake that would keep was baked and hidden (1935:364).

Given the different times at which garden crops need harvesting, preserving was an ongoing activity in the summer and fall. Informants commented:

We did our own canning. That was done during the whole summer. It was done in between [other work] and whenever the vegetables came up [were ready to be harvested]. For example, rhubarb already comes in the spring. In the summer you have other vegetables and you do them right away (M.W.p.c.).

The peas come out first. They needed to be shelled and canned. With the carrots and peas, I used to can approximately fifty quarts. Then you had beans and then you had tomatoes. The tomatoes I put upstairs and can them. And cucumbers, they come later. So, we just dilled them and put them in jars in different ways. And then your beets came which I kept under the potatoes; they kept long like that. And the cabbage was picked when we were digging the potatoes. After I dug the potatoes, I cleaned the garden right off. A lot of cabbage was made into sauerkraut in the sealers (O.L.p.c.).

Canning was done all day, all summer. There were the beans, peas, tomatoes in the fall, and the fruit. The women did all this work. The men were in the fields (M.W.p.c.).

In addition to the planning and labour that took place before the harvest crew arrived, women had to do a lot of extra planning and work during the stay of the threshers on the farm. As the local history of Minnedosa documents, "Threshing time was a busy time for the farmer's wife, with 18 to 25 hungry men to feed, three meals and lunch each day" (1958:149).

The absence of adequate refrigeration meant that several food items had to be prepared on a daily basis or, at least, twice to three times a week to avoid spoiling. For example, potatoes were generally peeled, washed and cooked on the day of consumption. Often farm women prepared mashed potatoes for dinner and fried potatoes for breakfast which required the additional tasks of mashing and spicing, cutting and frying. Breakfast generally included bacon, eggs, coffee and bread which had to be prepared every morning. Meat, vegetables and soup, too, were prepared daily. When these foods had not been prepared in advance, cutting, washing and cooking were additional tasks. Desserts usually consisted of puddings or pies. Many of the ingredients in pudding spoil quickly, especially the dairy components, so that daily repetition of these tasks was necessary. Farm women prepared sandwiches for an 'in-between' lunch as well. This included the extra tasks of slicing several loaves per day, buttering the slices, putting different toppings on them and, finally, wrapping them into a package to be taken out to the field.

Pies and many of the other baked goods like bread, cakes, cookies and doughnuts could usually be prepared two to three days ahead of time in fairly large batches. Kathleen Strange wrote in her autobiography that,

In the spring, and at harvest time, I baked every other day -- ten loaves and a bunch of cinnamon rolls every time (1937:220).

This was quite an increase in her weekly work load since she baked only twice a week during the other times of the year. Her pastries usually included a number of large cakes, pies and cookies in addition to the bread and buns. O.L.'s experience with baking for the threshers was similar.

Two loaves of bread was hardly enough to feed the threshers. I bake my own bread so I used to bake fourteen loaves per week plus a number of pies. You had to plan your meals (O.L.p.c.).

Similarly, the amounts of butter made for home consumption increased as the number of people residing on the farm grew. One farm woman told me that there were seventeen people in her family who, together, consumed one pound of butter per day. She said that her mother had to make a lot of butter to keep up with family demands (A.W.p.c.). It is not surprising then that buttermaking for home use increased in scope when women had to incorporate the needs of farm workers like hired men and threshers in their butter production.

In addition to food preparation, the dirty dishes and cutlery needed repeated cleaning, requiring greater amounts of water and wood to heat the stove than usual. With all the men working in the field, the women were often left to carry wood and water. One informant, J.H., remarked that the women had a harder time during harvest than men since the women on her farm had to haul water and wood by themselves (J.H.p.c.).

Every day during threshing time took on the same routine of catering to a large number of hungry farm workers. Nellie McClung wrote:

I ... found it hard to waken up bright and ready for the day's work, but there was no time to think about personal concerns for the men had to be fed. We prepared all we could the night before and had sliced the bacon and peeled the boiled potatoes and had pans of them ready to put in the oven dotted over with pieces of butter and sprinkled with pepper and salt, and soon two frying pans of bacon were sending out their cheerful incense and another pot of eggs was set to cook ... The coffee was made in big blue enamel pots and there was no question of timing or measuring. There was just one rule -- plenty of coffee and let it boil until the men came in ... The table, made as long as the size of the room allowed, was covered with oilcloth and had sugar-bowls and cream pitchers at intervals with a cruet-stand in the middle, a fine big silver affair with at least five compartments for pepper and salt, mustard, oil and vinegar in glass containers. And then there were glass pickle dishes ... (1935:367).

We sliced bread, a loaf at a time, and the table had plates of baking powder biscuits and pitchers of syrup and prints of butter ... At noon we often had soup as well as the meat and vegetables ... There was a keen satisfaction in cooking for people who enjoyed their meals like these hungry men, and I loved to see the great platters of hot roast beef beginning to show the pattern, knowing that a further supply was being sliced off in the kitchen, and that big pots of mashed and buttered potatoes and turnips were ready, too, to refill the vegetable dishes, and that the oven was full of baked rice pudding well filled with raisins, and that the big white pitchers on the table were full of thick cream, and if worst came to worst, that is if they cleaned up everything, we still had the pantry shelves full of pies and a brown crock full of doughnuts (1935:368).

Similarly, recollections of informants documented the daily routines:

Get meals! You would get up at around four o'clock in the morning and start your stove. And some of those darned men would sit there and didn't even get up to dig your potatoes. They would watch you go dig your own potatoes. You had potatoes for dinner and supper and sometimes fried up for breakfast too. We had to make three meals for them a day; and when it rained like this year you just had to feed them the same. You stayed and waited. The women had to feed them. We spent the whole day making meals. It never stopped. You rushed from one meal into the other. You finished

your breakfast dishes and started to get the biscuits ready for lunch. There was never a dull moment. The kids would do the chores. Get the cows in [the barn] to milk so they would be out before the horses came in (Rathwell group interview,p.c.).

I was fifteen and I worked on Mrs.A.'s farm for a month and they had the threshers out so she needed help. They had twenty-four men. I helped with the cooking. At four o'clock in the morning I was up. The men went to work at six o'clock. They had their breakfast. And then you had to make everything ready for dinner. And then you would make biscuits and bread ready for lunch in the afternoon and supper at night. They [the threshers] got a late, late supper. And then [late at night] you turn around and you would be dead when they left the table. But you would still do the dishes and set your table ready for breakfast (F.G.p.c.).

Besides the immense job of food preservation and preparation many farm women also laundered for the hired men on the farm.\* Without running water and electricity the increase in the volume of dirty clothing and bed linen to be washed and ironed caused a tremendous increase in the laundering work load. Kathleen Strange wrote,

I washed for the hired men as well as for my own family. We were always from eight to fifteen strong, according to the time of the year, and since most of the men worked in close contact with the soil, and with animals, there was always an astonishing pile of extremely dirty clothing -- mountains of overalls and socks, heavy underwear and flannel shirts, not to speak of voluminous bed linen (1937:220-221).

I did not ... iron the men's work shirts. Each lad was allowed one good shirt a week, which I washed and pressed for him (1937:222).

J.H. told me that she, too, placed a limit on the number of shirts she was willing to iron. Nevertheless, she still had to iron twenty-three shirts a week (J.H.p.c.).

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\* Although many farm women laundered for hired men, threshing crews may not have enjoyed this service. Further research is needed to clarify this.

The presence of hired men who lived with the farm family throughout the growing season probably generated more cleaning chores as well. Kathleen Caswell recollected that:

It was a very busy time for the women ... as the bunk house had to be scrubbed and ticks prepared for the extra hands ... (Rathwell, 1970:340).

There still remains the question as to what extent the presence of threshers increased the volume of house cleaning. Several sources indicated that threshers did not sleep inside the farmhouse itself. The local history of the Minnedosa district reported that (1958:149):

A caboose went along with the [threshing] outfit as it moved from farm to farm where men slept in bunks, taking along their own blankets.

This sleeping arrangement must have saved farm women work during harvest time. However, some archival sources have indicated that this had not always been the case, especially during the first few years after the advent of the threshing machine. Kate Johnson wrote in 1888, for example,:

Sleeping-caboose didn't travel with the threshing-outfits as they do nowadays. Instead sleeping-room was supplied by the farmer, each man usually bringing along his own pillow and blankets for a shakedown on the kitchen floor. In our home, the owner of the machine was treated with a little more deference, and in order to provide him with a real bed the children doubled up, four sleeping in the space that previously accommodated only two (Kate Johnson Manuscript, published in Robertson, 1974:98).

On the whole, the presence of an expanded labour force on the farm during the growing season, and especially at harvest time, generated an increase in domestic chores and preparatory



activities for farm women. Women had so much extra work in the home that, in fact, the shortage of labour to do domestic tasks became an acute problem.\* In the days of the threshing machine, a steady and reliable labour supply was as important to the farm woman responsible for domestic work as it was to her husband responsible for field work. If circumstances allowed, female hired help was employed to help the farm woman with the chores in the home and barnyard. But, as Nellie McClung wrote of the year 1895, it was very difficult to get domestic help (1935:366). Alleviating the shortage of employable women became the focus of immigration propaganda (Rasmussen, 1976:13). For example, a Canadian Pacific Railway advertisement directed "To The Young Women Of England, Ireland And Scotland" exclaimed:

While we require twenty to thirty thousand men to assist in reaping our bountiful harvest annually, there are but few young women come to the assistance of the ladies, whose duty is to provide for their household and for the additional help (cited in Rasmussen, 1976:18).

Eventually it became easier to find domestic help as single women immigrated and as young women from recently settled families in less well-to-do secondary settlement areas hired themselves out. Hired help was usually given menial tasks. M.V., for example, who went to work as a domestic servant at an early age, was assigned to laundry. She washed clothes both for the family that employed her and the hired help. The same family employed another girl to help with the meals (M.V.p.c.).

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\* A publication of the Public Archives of Canada indicated that between 1890 and 1920 there was a shortage of employable women in Canada (L'Esperance, 1982:27).

Cowan has argued that a hierarchy of tasks existed among women, children and hired help. She explained this hierarchy of tasks as follows:

Roughly speaking, the chores that required the least skill or organizational ability went to children (carrying water, milking cows, simple mending); those that were more arduous went to servants (scrubbing floors, doing laundry, minding small children, pounding corn); but those that either required fine judgement (churning butter) or some creativity (fine sewing) or much experience (making clothes) or considerable organizational skill (cooking meals) remained with the housewife herself (1983:29-30).

Given the importance of planning and the need to coordinate the work of hired help and children, women's organizational responsibilities grew in scope as the volume of subsistence and domestic work processes increased. This acted as an additional pull factor.

In summary, farm women's expanded responsibilities for food preservation and preparation, laundering and cleaning, and coordinating and organizing the work of hired help and children acted as a pull factor, drawing women out of field work. Remarks by informants confirm this. J.H., for example, explained in the following manner why her mother did not do field work:

Mother never worked in the field. When you have to feed seven or eight people, boy you didn't have time to be out there. No way! You have to can all the fruit and preserve the vegetables and look after the garden. That is YOUR big chunk! I think that is what the women mainly did (J.H.p.c.).

F.K. explained her own non-involvement in field work by saying, "I had my garden, that was MY job" (p.c.). Similarly, F.D. said, "You did not have time for that [field work]; you had to cook for so many men" (p.c.).

#### 4.3.3 Pull Factor: Farm Expansion and Women's Livestock Care

Ellis documented the rapid increase in farm livestock after the 1870s (1971:96,143-4,271). This increase accompanied farm expansion and mechanization. As prosperity levels rose, people added more draft horses, cattle, pigs, poultry and even a special pair of horses to draw the buggy to their farm animal population. Higher standards of living were not the only factor in this trend. The expansion in farm livestock was probably due in part to growing subsistence needs on the farm since the food needs of a greater number of people - employed farm workers in addition to the family itself - had to be provided for.

Informants commonly remarked that keeping livestock was a lot of work.

You had to look after everything that was living. It is the same like a person; it needs a lot of labour and attention (M.W.p.c.).

Cattle is labour intensive. It is twenty-four hours a day, 365 days of the year (N.I.p.c.).

Farm women have always been heavily involved in livestock care on mixed farms. A woman was generally wholly responsible for the poultry. She fed and watered them, rounded them up at night, cleaned the chicken coop, collected the eggs, set the 'clockers' to hatch eggs, looked after the new chicks and so on. In summertime, when farm flocks were largest, women's work in caring for them increased. Several women told me that their flocks numbered about two hundred birds. Children generally assisted with some of the menial tasks, like feeding, watering and

collecting eggs. But the farm women coordinated and supervised the children's chores in addition to performing the more complex tasks herself. For example, taking care of chicks was always K.I.'s mother's duty. Young chicks need more attention and work; they have to be fed well, kept warm and their health watched carefully (K.I.p.c.). Informant, N.C., told me:

I feed them and look after them when they are first on the farm when they are quite small. That is always my responsibility. I bring them in at night for the first three or four weeks.

Such tasks as monitoring young chicks, managing the clockers and redistributing the eggs for successful hatching, required experience.

Women generally looked after the pigs as well, often with the help of children.\* Women generally cared for the sows when they became ill or were delivering offspring. C.T. mentioned that in summertime the sows would have, on average, ten piglets each. She said:

There was lots of walking to the barn at night. Each sow got about ten young ones and you had to watch them. They were clumsy and could easily get hurt by the big sow. Delivering the piglets was heavy work. A sow would weigh two hundred or three hundred pounds and it could crash down on the piglets if you didn't push the sow over (C.T.p.c.).

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\* After the 1940's when hog raising became a specialized and commercial farm enterprise for some farm families, men appear to have become heavily involved in all aspects of this work process. But hog raising for domestic purposes appears to have remained a woman's responsibility on the farm. R.N. told me that on her parents' farm they only kept pigs for family consumption. The women on the farm were generally in charge of the sows and piglets. In R.N.'s case, hog raising was an automatic extension of her responsibility in the meat-preservation work process. Every summer one or two pigs were slaughtered and the women on her farm salted the pork for preservation.

Informants indicated that health care of large animals such as swine, cattle and even horses was usually delegated to the more experienced of the spouses and thus often fell to farm women (C.T.,M.V.p.c.).

Men appear to have been primarily responsible for looking after the horses -- an extension of field work. Archival sources as well as several informants mentioned men feeding the horses and cattle and cleaning the barn in the mornings. Even so, women were often involved in feeding and watering the large animals. One archival source reported that: "a job that the men felt was a little beneath them ... was pumping the water for the cattle to drink out of the well" (published in Robertson,1974:86). Watering the farm animals was very time-consuming as M.W. expressed:

All the hours we spent watering the cattle. You thought the cattle and horses would NEVER finish drinking. We had to pump it from a well, and pump and pump. Those cattle and horses just drink gallons (M.W.p.c.).

On her parental farm this chore was performed twice a day; in the morning and at night. In wintertime, the task of watering the farm animals became even more time-consuming. The wells and dugouts would freeze and new strategies had to be found to get enough water for family and livestock needs. Several farm women told me that one method was to melt snow to water the cattle and horses in wintertime.\* Another method was mentioned by N.I. who used to chop a hole in the dugout to water the cattle. She

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\* The tediousness of this method is described by Alberta pioneer Peggy Holmes (1985:107,116).

related:

I can remember when you had to go to the dugout and chop a hole every day to let the cattle go for a drink. And if it was storming it was no nice state, because the cattle didn't like the cold anymore than you did. You just turned them out and they would walk to the dugout (N.I.p.c.).

Children participated in livestock-keeping chores but women were usually in charge of the tasks performed by them. F.D. related that looking after the farm's livestock was a "family thing" but she herself "would see to it that it was done" (p.c.). While her children assisted her, F.D. did most of the tasks involving the farm animals herself (F.D.p.c.).

Women were also involved in procuring hay. F.D., for example, said,

I didn't do much fieldwork [in regard to grain crops].  
I did in haying! (p.c.).

Another informant, S.S., also indicated that her mother worked hard in the hay fields (S.S.p.c.).

Within the haying work process of past times, women often participated in mowing, raking, pitching and stacking (R.N.,O.L.,H.C.p.c.). The involvement of women in the various haying tasks may be explained by the fact that, even with the help of a mower and raker drawn by horses, haying was slow and time-consuming. But with the important grain harvest just around the corner, haying had to be done as quickly as possible. Time was scarce and the work was voluminous. In the Red River Settlement, similar ecological factors had caused high levels of

family involvement in haying. Even in the primary settlement areas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, farm women, men and children cooperated in haymaking in an effort to get as much of the haying done as possible by the time grain harvesting and threshing commenced.

As the number of milk cows increased on the average farmstead in Manitoba's established agricultural areas, so did the scope of the various dairying chores. As one informant, S.S., aptly put it:

There was just more work to do. Everything got bigger.  
There was more cattle; milk more cows (S.S.p.c.).

Women's responsibility for dairying was indicated by interviewees from both prime and marginal areas (S.S., F.W., N.I., F.G., F.D., C.T.p.c.). Most farm families kept a number of dairy cows which needed to be milked twice a day. Bringing the cows to the barn at night to milk them and returning them to the pastures was an additional chore often done by farm women and their daughters. Herding could be time consuming (F.G., F.K., N.I.p.c.). F.G. and her mother spent whole evenings "hunting" cows and taking them back to the barn to milk them (F.G.p.c.). N.I. sent her dog to the pasture to start the round-up and collected her twelve milk cows on horseback (N.I.p.c.).

Many other farm women indicated having taken cattle and often the horses as well to pasture. On many of the early farmsteads, however, the pastures had not yet been fenced in. Someone had to watch the cattle continuously so as to keep them out of the grain

fields. As in the case of young Nellie McClung (1935:116), a young daughter often did this task, suggesting continuity of female involvement from generation to generation.

In summary, women held overall responsibility for poultry, hogs and and milk cows and, to a somewhat lesser extent, cattle (for example, oxen) and horses. Watering and haymaking were especially tedious but important tasks. Women were also responsible for dairying. The work processes related to keeping livestock expanded in volume and became more time consuming as farms expanded and their work force grew. This constituted an additional pull factor in the trend towards declining female participation in field tasks.

#### 4.3.4 Pull Factor: Decline in Men's Subsistence Involvement

At the same time as livestock-related chores increased, certain components of men's work began to demand more of their time, drawing them increasingly out of subsistence work processes in which there had traditionally been a high degree of task sharing between men and women.

In response to the rapidly developing cash economy, males became increasingly involved in commercial, field-crop production. New field equipment was introduced which, at the same time, made cash crop production on a larger scale not only feasible but also stimulated further expansion of cultivated acreage. As the acreage under cultivation increased, the tasks



in the grain-growing work process grew in scope. This is particularly evident with threshing. Threshing became more time-consuming as crop size increased, placing greater demands on men's time. The maintenance of field equipment also became more time-consuming with mechanization. Compared to the relatively simple hand tools of previous decades, repair of mechanized implements was more complex and, often, new parts had to be purchased at distant service centres.\*

Farm improvement activities also placed time constraints on men. Breaking new land for cultivation was a major summertime occupation. Construction was another. Sod and log buildings which had functioned as homes and barns in the first few years of settlement were now replaced by frame buildings. In addition, as families, livestock and cultivated acreage grew, men built bigger houses and additional barns, cattle sheds, bins and wells. Construction often occurred in the form of building-bees which called for reciprocation, thus drawing men away from their own farms. Neighbouring men often formed threshing gangs on the same principle and were therefore absent from their farms while helping with threshing elsewhere. In the early decades of community building, men were also called away to participate in the construction of schools, churches and roads.

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\* This is well illustrated in Nellie McClung's autobiography. In a chapter aptly entitled "Men and Machines", she described the growing demands of machinery repair (1935:128-129). Later on in her book, she again commented on men's growing preoccupation with equipment maintenance as Sundays, traditionally a 'day of rest', became the day to overhaul the threshing machine (1935:370-371).

Activities commonly carried out by men during wintertime also often limited their involvement in subsistence work processes. Depending on the amount of grain one had for market plus the distance from farm to elevator, hauling grain may well have been the most time-consuming task for men during the winter.\* In the early 1880s, when most towns did not as yet have their own elevator and railway facilities, grain had to be hauled over great distances to larger commercial centres. Given the mode of transportation of the day, that is, comparatively slow horse-drawn wagons with a capacity under one hundred bushels, frequent trips were necessary and the distance covered made these trips especially time-consuming. When many agricultural districts became connected to the transcontinental railways through branch lines toward the end of the nineteenth century, the distance from farm to elevator decreased, reducing the amount of time per trip. However, as farms expanded in size, the quantities of wheat to be hauled increased. The advantages of shorter distances were therefore offset by more numerous trips. Friesen asserted that grain hauling could "occupy the entire winter" (1984:331).

Another of men's winter pursuits in areas of the province where trees and bush were abundant was cutting and hauling wood for construction and fuel. A male informant, H.C., whose father had a contract for one hundred and later two hundred cords of wood per winter, emphasized the amount of time that went into

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\* The Philip Crampton Manuscript documents this: "The winter months were the time for hauling the wheat to market. As we were about thirteen miles distant from the nearest grain elevator, hauling the several thousand bushels of wheat was a major problem" (published in Robertson, 1974:102).

cutting cordwood given that one person could cut and split only about one-and-a-half cords per day. The hauling of cordwood, too, was time-consuming as is illustrated by Henry Gaultier who noted that hauling one load was "twelve miles round trip, with oxen [sic] this was a day's work" (Rathwell, 1970:181).

Yet another of men's winter activities was cutting ice blocks from nearby rivers and hauling them to ice houses for summer cold storage. This was often done in the form of ice-cutting bees among neighbours (Rapid City, 1970:343).

From the descriptions of men's seasonal activities, it is evident that time which could be spent on domestic and barnyard chores was limited. Despite the increasing scope of such chores as watering, feeding and doctoring livestock, cleaning barns, and milking, men helped proportionally less.\* Where men's labour was reduced, women and children stepped up their own direct involvement. The following excerpt from an archival source documents the direct link between the allocation of male labour to certain necessary winter activities and the work performed by

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\* Informants indicated that men participated in milking and livestock-keeping chores "when there was no field work" and sometimes year-round (N.I., D.T., J.H.p.c.). This is not contradictory. If a farm family had many able-bodied sons or hired men, activities such as grain hauling or breaking more land may not have occupied all the men all of the time. In these cases male participation in milking could occur. In addition, if there were too few able-bodied women, they needed to be released from some tasks and so male participation was called for. J.H., for example, related that on her parental farm, only her mother and herself did all the domestic work for an expanding farm household. She had three brothers who, together with her father, did all the milking on the farm. However, J.H.'s mother remained in charge of cleaning the milking equipment and processing the milk into dairy products (J.H.p.c.).

women and children in and around the barnyard in this season.

My father and one hired man, a young Englishman, had been hauling wood from the bush six miles away every day that it was fit. Load upon load they hauled ... Laborious work but necessary. My sister and I did most of the chores to enable them to haul as much wood as possible ... [The cattle] must be fed, watered and milked ... Towards five o'clock in the afternoon my sister and I lit the lantern and did the milking and fed and watered the cows. We carried the water from the well ... Fortunately the well was not frozen. That done, we took the milk to the house ... We carried in wood and water ... (published in Robertson, 1974:68).

The case of informant N.I. is another example. N.I.'s husband did not participate in the milking in the summer. Without her husband's help, N.I. and her children spent about twenty-five percent more time on milking alone to compensate.

The growing involvement of men in commercial, field-crop production and other activities during the late spring, summer and early fall reduced their labour contributions in gardening as well. Despite the growth in consumption of garden produce with the introduction of large, seasonal work crews, women took on more of the gardening tasks. Farm gender roles in subsistence gardening shifted concomitantly from a general male-female involvement, as had been characteristic of the subsistence economy of the Red River era and early pioneer period, to an almost exclusively female involvement in the period of commercialization. Ellis has identified this trend as well. He wrote:

[The] number and proportion of the population involved in the various aspects of horticulture [garden cultivation] varied with time to a marked degree. In the agricultural pioneer years most families on farms, ... were involved to some degree in vegetable growing

or in subsistence gardening; but with the growth of commercial farming, farm operators in general became less concerned with gardening as essential to existence, and ... farm women in general maintained varying degrees of involvement in the farm garden ... (1971:404).

The gradual withdrawal of males from gardening is evident from field notes. Interviews with contemporary farm women indicate almost exclusive female involvement in this subsistence work process. Tasks in which men were most commonly involved were related to preparing the garden plot for cultivation. Male assistance in other tasks such as hoeing, weeding, picking and shelling peas, and watering garden plants seems to be minimal or absent altogether. The help of children is more common in these garden chores. Farm woman, F.D., for example, mentioned her husband's assistance in cultivating the garden but, at the same time, her account illustrates the gradual withdrawal of male participation from other garden tasks:

We had a big garden and grew enough vegetables for a year. My husband enjoyed gardening and helped out. But that changed with time. It finally got to be MY garden. He always cultivated it with a horse and small cultivator. I used to lead the horse and walk beside it (F.D.p.c.).

Like so many of his contemporaries, F.D.'s husband got increasingly caught up in the various aspects of commercial grain growing and general farm-improvement projects. F.D. related that both family and farm were growing which demanded more of her husband's labour in carpentry and activities related to field work (p.c.).

In summary, the decline in men's participation in subsistence production occurred at the same time that the volume of many of the tasks within subsistence work processes increased as a result of greater numbers of people and livestock on farms. This had implications for women in that the increased work load was done by fewer people, thus acting as an additional factor drawing women into domestic and barnyard work processes. It may be concluded that women's labour expenditure in livestock care and gardening facilitated the process of farm development by enabling men to concentrate on farm improvement and expansion.

#### 4.3.5 Pull Factor: Industrialization of Housekeeping

Toward the end of the 1800s, a number of changes took place in the technological system underlying housework. New household appliances like cookstoves, washing machines, and cream separators, and products such as canning equipment, refined flour, manufactured cloth and coal-oil lamps became available through local retail outlets and mail-order houses. Commercial services like butcher shops and grist mills also became accessible.

It may be presumed that the industrialization of housekeeping through the adoption of these industrial products eased the burden of women's work in the home. However, as Cowan has argued, in order "to discover whether industrialization has made housework easier [we] must ask not only whether one activity has been altered, but also whether the chain in which that activity

is a link [the entire work process] has been transformed" (Cowan,1983:12). For example, while the widespread use of cast-iron stoves reduced the tasks of cutting and hauling wood because they were more efficient burners than the open-hearth and simple box stoves of earlier times, they, at the same time, transformed the cooking work process into a more complex and time-consuming responsibility by allowing different methods of cooking to take place simultaneously. Boiling potatoes, simmering a soup and baking a pie became possible all at once, making one-dish meals obsolete (Cowan,1983:62). Since the provisioning of fuel was traditionally a male responsibility and the provisioning of prepared foods a female responsibility, it becomes evident that the presence of sophisticated cast-iron stoves saved the labour of men while augmenting that of women (Cowan,1983:61). Moreover, the cast-iron stove brought along the extra tasks of daily cleaning and weekly polishing to prevent rusting (Cowan,1983:62). These tasks, too, augmented women's work in the home as was evident from comments made by informants (Rathwell group interview, p.c.).

The availability of highly refined industrial flour caused similar changes in the grain-processing and baking work processes. Whereas the tasks involved in constructing grain-processing tools and grinding and bolting became obsolete, the various tasks involved in the baking work process became highly labour-intensive. With the coarse flours of earlier times, only the baking of 'quick breads' like bannock and 'quick cakes' like

scones and oat cakes had been common. An authentic bannock recipe, received during a visit to Lower Fort Garry, a museum depicting life in the Red River Settlement, called for merely five minutes of mixing and kneading ingredients after which the dough is baked for twenty minutes. The procedure for baking scones, similarly, called for the light tossing of ingredients and brief kneading and baking of the dough. Other pastries did not yet exist. A Red River woman commented, for example, that "we had no cakes or pies in those days" (Healy, 1923:149).

The introduction of fine wheat flour allowed for the baking of 'yeast breads', pastries, cakes and other confections (Cowan, 1983:52).<sup>\*</sup> Unlike the relatively quick baking procedures of the past, yeast breads called for the preparation of a yeast culture, heavy and frequent kneading and lengthy periods of rising and baking, while cakes called for lengthy beating and mixing of ingredients to reach "the necessary state of aeration" (Cowan, 1983:51,52). As a result, although the adoption of industrial flour eliminated certain grain-processing tasks in which both genders had been involved, women, unlike men, did not enjoy a net saving of labour because the baking work process had

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\* The transition to baking with fine wheat flour was gradual in Manitoba, occurring at different rates in different agricultural regions of the province. For example, while relatively prosperous farmsteaders in Manitoba's primary settlement areas, like Nellie McClung's family, were already baking the lighter 'yeast bread' (probably using wild hops to make the yeast) before the turn of the century, some of the less well-off settlers in newly opened frontier regions were still grinding their grain by hand and baking 'quick breads' well into the twentieth century. R.T., who came to Manitoba from the Ukraine in 1903 related that for many years "mother was grinding her own flour; making brown flour from which she baked brown bread in the oven in the yard every day" (R.T.p.c.).



become more complex and time-consuming. Moreover, with the increase in number of people working on the farm and with the higher levels of consumption associated with greater prosperity, the baking process expanded in volume. Pies, cakes, doughnuts and many other kinds of baked goods became daily consumption items towards the late 1800s.

Most women baked twice a week, but at threshing time it was more common to bake every other day. Kathleen Strange mentioned that she baked ten loaves of bread, a bunch of cinnamon rolls and other baked goods every second day during busy seasons in the spring and at harvest time (1937:222). Of course, on special occasions such as a picnic, wedding, funeral or for Sunday guests, extra provisions were baked. Katheen Strange wrote in her autobiography that, in order to provide for possible guests on Sunday, she would bake several loaves of bread, two large cakes, numerous cookies and at least six pies (1937:219).

When canning equipment became widely available in the late pioneer era, the work processes involved in preserving food changed dramatically as well. In the Red River Settlement and on the frontier, garden produce was kept in mud basements and fruit was generally dried into cakes. Meat, particularly pork, was cured by salting or smoking. Beef, however, was seldom cured and, as a result, could spoil quickly in the summertime. Whereas many farm families of the Red River Settlement resorted to eating

pemmican, the pioneers of the late 1800s organized beef rings\* which allowed them to eat fresh beef on a regular basis throughout the summer. Preservation, then, was unnecessary.

Canning food was a great deal more time- and energy-consuming than simply storing vegetables in a mud basement, drying fruit into small clusters or curing meat. Canning required washing and sterilizing the sealers, and cutting, spicing, filling the sealers and cooking. Moreover, canning allowed women to put their meats and produce up in different ways. Fresh beef and chicken, and salted or smoked pork could now be varied with canned meats which could be prepared using different recipes. Similarly, tomatoes, beets, cucumbers, cabbage and other vegetables could be pickled or processed into a variety of products. Fruits, too, could be preserved into jams, jellies, or various pie fillings.

In addition, canning equipment enabled farm women to preserve food items which, because of their perishable nature, were not preserved in the past. For example, eggs and certain vegetables like tomatoes or cucumbers, which had been summer and early fall foods, now became a winter and spring food choice as well. The same applies to fruits. Certain berries could be preserved by drying while others, like strawberries and raspberries could not. Canning fruit allowed for consumption of greater quantities and a greater variety of fruits during the entire year.

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\* A beef ring was a cooperative arrangement between neighbouring farm families whereby, each week or month, the members took turns in contributing an animal for slaughter. The fresh meat was distributed among the member households.

Just as the cast-iron stove meant the demise of one-pot cooking, so too did canning result in the replacement of simple food-processing recipes with varied recipes and comparatively complex procedures. Canning, therefore, triggered an increase in women's work load in food preservation. It "vastly increased the amount of work that women were expected to do when the season was 'on'" (Cowan,1983:66). This was further augmented by the need to feed an expanding work force on the farm.

As commercial services became available, they, like many industrial products, changed the nature of gender involvement in related farm work processes. Butchery, for example, eliminated the tasks of killing and cutting-up livestock on the farm for family consumption -- tasks traditionally carried out by men. However, the role of women in meat processing and especially in preservation remained, by and large, unchanged for some time.

With the widespread introduction of factory-made cloth, tasks involving the home production of cloth such as raising and shearing sheep, and washing, carding, spinning and weaving or knitting wool were reduced. On some prosperous farms, they were eliminated altogether. This is illustrated well by Nellie McClung's mother who had always produced cloth herself but left her spinning-wheel and loom behind in Ontario upon moving in the 1880s because she had been informed that local stores in Manitoba would sell factory-made cloth (McClung,1935:178).

However, although the decline in home production of cloth reduced the labour of men, women and children in related tasks, women, unlike men and children, experienced not a reduction in total work load within the clothing manufacture and maintenance work process but a shift from one set of tasks to another. The adoption of factory-made cloth, especially cotton, increased the sewing, mending and laundering tasks for which women were traditionally responsible.

Factory-made cloth was less durable than home-made wool and leather garments. This is documented by Nellie McClung, whose mother asserted that "hand-made cloth will wear ten times as long" (1935:178). The lesser durability of materials like cotton increased the number of times women had to sew new garments and mend old ones. Moreover, the adoption of factory-made cloth coincided with "an increase in the amount of clothing that people expected to own" (Cowan, 1983:64). As community life developed in rural Manitoba, participation in social events called for clothing which met a dresscode. Informants mentioned the need for school outfits and proper clothing with which to attend church and dances (F.G., J.H.p.c.). The larger amount of clothes owned per person greatly expanded women's sewing work load. Larger wardrobes also meant more laundry. What is more, factory-made cloth was more easily laundered and could therefore be washed more often (Cowan, 1983:65). In addition, it appears that, in accordance with social norms, women in former times ironed more items than is common today. S.S., for example, remarked:

"we ironed everything, that's how it was done" (p.c.). The local history of Minnedosa and pioneer author Kathleen Strange mentioned the ironing of "frilled petticoats, baby's long dresses and father's bosom shirts and stiff cuffs" (Minnedosa, 1958:153), and "towels, sheets, pillow slips, and so forth" (Strange, 1937:222).

The availability of washing machines did not immediately entail a reduction in farm women's laundering work load. Although they eliminated the task of scrubbing and, when outfitted with a wringer, the task of wringing-out the laundry by hand, they created the new tasks of 'cranking' the washing machine and wringer by hand since early washing machines were not yet automated.

Turning the handle to swish the clothes around was a heavy job, ... I always had several long skirts and petticoats to wash ... Our heavy underwear, thick sweaters, and Harry's work overalls and woolen socks were difficult to get clean with our primitive apparatus (Holmes, 1980:141-143).

Moreover, one still had to make soap, carry fuelwood and water into the house, heat the stove, boil the water, cook, dry, iron and fold the clothes, dispose of the dirty water and, finally, scrub the kitchen floor. Given that other tasks within laundering remained unchanged and that the numbers of garments to be laundered grew, washing machines did not greatly reduce the time that women had to invest in this work process. Even the advent of gas-powered washing machines did not do so since, while cranking was eliminated, related tasks were unaffected, that is, water still had to be hauled, heated, carried to the machine and

disposed of.\* What is more, given the expense and complexity of automated washing machines, women tended to carry out more of the laundering tasks themselves, rather than delegate the operation of the machines to children or hired help.

This development also occurred with the introduction of sewing machines, coal-oil lamps and cream separators. When coal-oil lamps replaced home-made candles, for example, women became responsible for the upkeep of the glass globes (chimneys) which involved the daily removal of soot (Cowan, 1983:65,66). In contrast, candlemaking had involved task sharing with children and had been carried out periodically, not daily. Similarly, when cream separators replaced the shallow milk pans of the past, task sharing with children and hired help in separating cream declined. I was told by H.C. that the cream separator "was a machine like a centrifuge; it turns very fast and the cream comes up because it is lighter; milk goes through a channel and is separated in different spouts" (p.c.). The early cream separators were cranked by hand. Later, gas-powered ones became available. Because of its complexity and expense, women may have been inclined to operate the separator themselves. Especially the operation of the gas-powered separator could be a tedious chore as is illustrated by an excerpt from Mrs. Florence Morrison's account of her grandmother's first cream separator, purchased in 1903 (Rathwell, 1970:345).

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\* In fact, there is some indication that, until piped-in water and water heaters became available, automated washing machines increased the water-hauling task because they required more water to operate well (O.L.p.c.).

This machine was equipped with an oil cup, similar to that on engines, a drop every few seconds, also had a clutch that would slip, so no power, then Grandma would take a lid off the back and with a little ashes on a teaspoon give it the treatment, and off it would go, to get the job finished.

Women also became responsible for the daily maintenance of the cream separator. Informant M.W. complained:

That cream separator; it had to be washed in the morning; all those little things and spouts on the cream separator. And if you didn't put them in the right order and you put the milk through in the next morning, all the milk would run over the floor if you didn't put the discs in the right order. Because you see, you had to take the separator apart, then wash it, and then put it back together again. If you did it right away [wash the separator immediately after use], it wasn't too bad, but if you let it sit the cream and milk would settle on it and it would harden. Well, leave THAT for a couple of hours and you have these eighteen or twenty discs that all stuck together; you couldn't even pull them apart. And, imagine washing that [the hardened milk] out of all those little grooves. And if you didn't it would spoil the cream the next day because it tasted rotten. And another thing, that cream separator had spouts which needed to be set properly. Otherwise you would get milk in your cream, oh God, [or on the floor! (M.W.p.c.)].

Evidently, cleaning the cream separator was not only a tedious chore but a complex one as well. In the past, with the use of milk pans, almost anyone could have cleaned the separating utensils. However, children or servants were probably not always allowed to take the separator apart, clean it and reassemble the different parts afterwards. In other words, the advent of more sophisticated household appliances and wares reorganized the domestic division of labour in such a way that women came to be responsible for more of the work themselves.

In summary, the purchase of household appliances, consumer goods and commercial services removed the tedium of many tasks within domestic work processes. They reshaped work processes at the same time, however. While it may be presumed that industrial products reduced the investment of time by women in domestic work processes, women's work did not decrease. The reason is two-pronged. First of all, laborious but simple tasks were mechanized, but the remaining manual tasks in the work processes became more complex or new tasks were created. New domestic tasks and those requiring skill and care devolved upon the senior woman who had ultimate responsibility. Second, a larger work force, greater prosperity and a desire for higher standards of material consumption increased the scope of domestic work processes. These circumstances apply to the expansion of the work processes involved in food preservation and preparation and to the clothing-manufacture and -maintenance work processes. They apply equally to house-cleaning work processes in as much as homes became larger as prosperity increased.

Given technological change and increasing demands, women's investment of time in domestic work processes increased while that of men and children declined. In her book More Work For Mother, Ruth Cowan has argued:

As the nineteenth century wore on, in almost every aspect of household work, industrialization served to eliminate the work that men (and children) had once been assigned to do, while at the same time leaving the work of women either untouched or even augmented (1983: 63-64).\*

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\* It should be noted that Cowan focused on the rate of industrialization of American households. The industrialization



The industrialization of housekeeping, which helped make the increased scope of domestic work processes feasible, can be included among the pull factors drawing women out of field work.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

A closer look at how technological innovations and socio-economic conditions affect the chain of tasks within a work process is necessary to assess the impact of change on gender roles. The development in Manitoba of commercial grain farming with the advance of the transnational railway in the 1880s sparked a shift in the sexual division of labour on farms. Men concentrated their energies on commercial production and their labour became increasingly associated with the rapidly developing market economy. Women, on the other hand, became increasingly drawn into subsistence and domestic work processes as these became more demanding. Task sharing between men and women declined. A stricter segregation of farm gender roles developed as women were drawn away from field-crop production and as men participated less in domestic and subsistence work processes. Segregation was not as evident on less prosperous farms and women continued to help in work processes traditionally associated with males when available male labour was insufficient to meet

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of households on the Canadian prairies, however, took place at a later point in time due to the socio-economic isolation of pioneer farms. Many household appliances, consumer goods and commercial services available to American households by the middle of the nineteenth century, became available to prairie farm households in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when rural service centres emerged and mail-order catalogues began to reach isolated farm families.

immediate demands.

Conditions which have led to stricter segregation have been called "push and pull factors". Identifying relative prosperity and an adequate male labour force as push factors does not reveal fully why women reduced their participation in commercial field work. Assessing the conditions which drew women into other demanding pursuits, that is pull factors, lends more explanatory power to the analysis. Pull factors identified were the increased work load in subsistence activities as larger numbers of field workers needed domestic services, the increased work load in looking after growing numbers of farm livestock, the decline in men's participation in subsistence production leaving women with a proportionally larger share of the work, and, finally, the industrialization of housekeeping which reorganized the domestic division of labour in such a way that women did most domestic work by themselves. Notwithstanding stricter segregation of gender-specific activities in farming, there can be no doubt that women's and men's activities remained complementary.

## Chapter V

### FARM WOMEN'S ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION TO FARM DEVELOPMENT

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

By placing women's work in the context of ecological and economic conditions affecting the farm and farm economy, their contributions to the financial well-being of farm and family can be examined.

##### 5.1.1 The High Cost Of Farming

Upon settlement in the province of Manitoba, settlers needed a considerable amount of cash to establish a successful farm. Friesen wrote that "each homestead unit would require a capital outlay of several thousand dollars in the period of proving up" (1984:310 emphasis added). Settlers had to invest in building materials, supplies, equipment and tools with which to clear and farm the land and establish a household. These assets were very expensive, especially given the fact that the tariff and railway policies of the time -- two major components of the federal government's National Policy aimed at integrating the economies of western and eastern Canada -- inflated their purchase price. For example, tariffs levied on (primarily American) imports were set at fifteen percent ad valorem in the 1870s and raised to

thirty-five percent in 1883 (Friesen, 1984:188, Morton, 1967:210). An Ontario settler in Manitoba during the early 1880s wrote to his mother that, "Everything costs 200 percent more than in Ontario" (J.M. Wallis letters, published in Robertson, 1974:116).

Once established, the costs of production were very high. For example, the railway policy forced settlers to pay transportation costs on goods shipped in both directions (Friesen, 1984:188). This acted as an incentive to generate higher cash incomes by expanding the cash-crop acreage under cultivation. Expansion in itself required considerable monetary investments. It usually involved the acquisition of more land through purchase. Moreover, more land also meant additional operating costs as more machinery and hired help was needed to run the larger farm operation. The costs of equipment, repairs and supplies, and wages for threshers and hired help amounted to high cash outlays for farm families. Threshing costs, for example, could be very high in proportion to actual farm income earned. An excerpt from the Kate Johnson manuscript, dated 1888, illustrates this.

With luck one might get rid of the threshers in a week; that is, barring rainy-days and break-down, but this seldom happened. Indeed, by the time binder-twine had been purchased, threshing-bills paid, and men and horses fed, there was little left to reward the farmer for his long hours of toil. If by any chance there was a surplus, most of it went to the Machine Company as payment on the plough or binder (Kate Johnson Manuscript, published in Robertson, 1974:98).

Farm expansion was costly in another way: more land meant higher taxes. Municipal taxes increased irrespective of whether the farm had yielded enough income to pay for them.

Farm commercialization added to the settlers' costs of living as well. As farm-commodity production became more demanding, they came to rely increasingly on purchased goods and services instead of manufacturing such items as leather harnesses, shoes, cloth and candles themselves. Moreover, certain consumer items like baking-soda, coffee and syrup ceased to be luxuries and gradually became family staples. An additional financial burden was the higher price of commercial goods and services purchased in rural towns compared to larger urban centers such as Winnipeg. Ewanchuk wrote, for example, that during the first few years of Ukrainian settlement in the Interlake region, storekeepers charged high prices for low-quality goods because of their relative monopoly position in the area (1977:261).

The high cost of farming was evident from the high levels of indebtedness incurred by farm families of that time. When the Canadian Pioneer Problems Committee undertook its farm surveys\* in the summers of 1930 and 1931, it was discovered that a large proportion of farm families was in debt and that most debts were owed to banks, land companies, machinery companies, credit societies and merchants. For example, thirty-five percent of Manitoban farms were mortgaged by 1931 (Murchie, 1936:79). In the Red River Valley it was found that 139 farms out of 150 farms supplying financial information reported some kind of

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\* The surveys by the Canadian Pioneer Problems Committee (published in the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement series) were carried out during the first two years of the Depression. However, at the time of data collection for these surveys, the Depression had not as yet taken its toll on family farming as it would in the mid and late 1930s. The data, therefore, does not reflect depressed economic circumstances.

indebtedness. Total debt averaged \$5,707 per farm for all farms (Murchie, 1936:137,138). Considering that this farm district was the most developed in terms of farm expansion and mechanization (ibid:138) it is evident that farm development did not take place without a considerable financial burden.

#### 5.1.2 The Effects of Boom-Bust Cycles on Farming

The financial burden resulting from the high capital costs of establishing and operating a farm was exacerbated by recessions in the farm economy. Economic depressions have been a consistently recurring component of the prairie wheat economy, affecting income security on the farm. In Manitoba, the first commercial depression already started in 1873 when the Mackenzie government failed to ensure the rapid completion of the Pacific railway. The situation was worsened by grasshopper plagues (Morton, 1967:174,175). The next few years witnessed an upswing in the prairie economy. Farmsteads were encouraged to buy land and equipment at inflated prices. Many did so by taking out loans at high, fixed interest rates. These farmsteads became financially more vulnerable and subject to cash-flow problems. Just as they attempted to alleviate these problems by increasing wheat yields, a second depression set in. Wheat prices dropped to an all-time low in 1886. Morton remarked that, "For men struggling with the heavy costs of building, breaking land, and buying farm machinery, this blow was severe" (1967:210). Between 1888 and 1896, the low price of wheat and poor yields due to climatic circumstances kept farm incomes low.

In 1896, an upswing in prices for farm produce occurred (Morton, 1967:272,273). However, in 1912-1913, prices for wheat dropped again while freight rates went up, putting farmsteaders in a tight, cost-price squeeze (1967:330). The First World War eased the severity of this downturn by creating a higher demand for wheat, leading to better prices. But benefits were quickly offset by the ever-climbing costs of production. As Morton wrote, "in this race of rising prices and costs lay the possibility of disaster for the farmer, urged to produce to the limit and driven to increase his outlay in order to do so" (Morton, 1967:357). Immediately after the war, prices for farm produce fell again.

A new upswing in the prairie economy occurred after 1924. More and more land was put into wheat production but this eventually created an enlarged wheat supply in excess of the actual domestic and international demand. Farmsteaders who relied on this cash crop as their main source of income found themselves vulnerable when prices dropped in the 1930s. Low prices combined with drought conditions devastated many farm operations.

In summary, high costs of production, transportation, consumer goods and taxes placed farm families in a cost-price squeeze which formed an incentive to expand the land base and mechanize in order to increase the margin of income over outlay. But cyclical fluctuations in grain prices made earning an adequate income to support the family and finance capital-asset

accumulation from field-crop production alone uncertain. These circumstances were harsher in marginal, secondary settlement areas where field-crop production was less readily expanded, soil productivity was lower and therefore, income from field-crop production was less than in primary settlement areas.

To cope, many farm families, whether in prime or marginal farm areas, relied on income from sources other than grain sales. They also stretched their income from various sources by minimizing cash outlays for family needs. As household managers, women were at the helm of such economizing efforts and also carried out a variety of income-generating activities.

## 5.2 WOMEN'S ECONOMIZING STRATEGIES

Farm women employed numerous strategies to economize on cash outlays. They upheld an ethic of frugality in expenditures for family needs, postponed the purchase of household appliances, provided services themselves instead of purchasing them, utilized country provisions such as wild plants and game and, finally, maintained subsistence production for family provisioning as part of farm operations.

### 5.2.1 Women's Ethic of Frugality

Women's economizing on household needs was reinforced by an ethic of frugality. Working hard and saving diligently were high priorities. As anthropologist Seena B. Kohl asserted in her study of Saskatchewan farm women (1976:71):



The role the woman plays in controlling family expenditures and family consumption wants ... is important in the success or failure of the development process of the enterprise.

The frugal attitude of farm women in the past is reflected in Nellie McClung's complaints about her mother's 'penny pinching'. She wrote that, despite the fact that her family's farm was prospering, her mother continued to insist on economizing on certain types of luxuries.

Even in the face of an abundant crop, the acid little economies of the household went on, little restrictions which burned into me ... Looking back, I can see how unfair I was to mother ... she knew how slowly money came, with eggs ten cents a dozen and butter eighteen (McClung, 1935:227-228).

The same attitude was also illustrated by the mother of Kate Johnson, one of Manitoba's early pioneer women.

When the prices of wool, butter and eggs had been ascertained and the amounts totalled up, so that she knew how much money she had to spend, mother's shopping-list was brought out ... Not until all the necessary articles on her list were struck off did mother indulge in luxuries, and even these were carefully selected (Kate Johnson Manuscript, published in Robertson, 1974:178).

#### 5.2.2 Deferred Purchase of Domestic Appliances

The need for frugality impacted on the purchase of household appliances. The industrialization of housekeeping usually lagged behind the process of farm mechanization. This did not change even in the post-war era, despite high levels of prosperity on the average farm. J.R.'s words illustrate this:

Even though technology came in after the war, WHO made use of the technology first? The men. Not the women. I know women who, for years, didn't have waterworks in

the house when the water was in the barn. I don't know why it was so necessary for these cows to be so well looked after. But I suppose from the men's point of view, they could do their work faster and it was better for the animals so they would grow wool faster or get fatter faster; so they [the men] could sell it faster; they felt that the farm was where the income was coming from (p.c.).

This reasoning was also expressed by other interviewees. An informant from Miami told me that "farm mechanization was more important because that was where your money and food was coming from; the mechanization of the home was of second-rate importance" (M.W.p.c.). She added:

It only makes sense that they replaced the horse. A horse is a living thing and you could only work it so much, so many hours a day. It would be foolish to have a washing machine in the house and trying to work with horses outside. So, it [farm mechanization] was just economy wise. You could cover more land and put in more grain (M.W.p.c.).

Anthropologist Seena Kohl noted in the same vein that farm women in southwestern Saskatchewan were "willing to delay the accumulation of household aids" (1976:95). Especially in families where there were one or more sons, women supported farm expansion "with its necessary contraction of domestic consumption" (1976:85). In A Harvest Yet To Reap, this economizing strategy is explained in more detail.

[People] were chronically short of cash with which to buy manufactured goods. As a result, they had to keep their purchases to a minimum by producing everything they could at home, whether it was a pound of lard or a cake of soap. In many cases, they had to do without expensive labour savers like washing machines and running water. The settlers' first priority was not comfort but economic security: their future depended on making a commercial success of the farm. And any extra money was less likely to be spent on household conveniences than on efficient machinery for producing the cash crop. Consequently, ... long after the farm work had been taken over by horses and machines, many farm homes ran on womanpower (Rasmussen, 1976:42).

By deferring the purchase of domestic technology and thus maintaining more labour-intensive procedures, women made an indirect, yet vital contribution to the development of the commercial component of the farm.

### 5.2.3 Provisioning Of Goods And Services

Farm women provided a host of services for farm and family which were aimed at economizing on farm and household expenses. C.T. told me, for example, how she used to save money by looking after the livestock's health:

We treated the pigs ourselves. I used to watch the vet at work and learn from him. Later I would do it myself and that saved about \$85 for a vet's visit ... A vet is too expensive, especially when the animal dies anyway. Even if you sold that pig later, you did not get that expense out! (C.T.p.c.).

Similarly, Mrs. Mae Olstad related:

They used to call me the veterinary. I never learned from anybody. I just wasn't afraid and I just didn't have the money (published in Rasmussen, 1976:54).

Many farm women also restrained family expenses on medical services. Although women generally delivered children without the help of a doctor in pioneering times when professional medical assistance was lacking,\* they often continued to do so in later times to save money. For example, Mrs. Beatrice Vincent related:

[We] sent for [a doctor] and they was three hours late and I had everything done, had the baby dressed and myself washed and the afterbirth taken out and put into the heater. And then he came and felt my pulse and

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\* It was only during the 1920s that giving birth in hospital became prevalent.

said, "Well you're just as nature led you. That's forty-five dollars please." Yes, that was it and he'd only come six miles ... But I had sent for him and naturally I had to pay him. So after that when I was in a family way I never sought for any doctor. I asked the Lord to help me and he gave me health and strength. I had all twelve of them without any doctor ... (published in Rasmussen, 1976:76).

Women commonly assisted each other as midwives during childbirth and saved on doctors' bills in this way. They also continued to manufacture home remedies for a variety of illnesses, even after patent medicine became available, around the turn of this century, through travelling salesmen and local stores. They often shared their knowledge in an attempt to save money and still cure their families. For example, with respect to birth-control remedies, a letter from a daughter to her mother revealed:

So you wanted some information. Well, I can tell you several methods. I have the real recipe of that cocoa butter ... a friend's ... sister ... got from her doctor after she'd had four. He charged her \$50 for it, but since, she's given it to dozens and it works (published in Rasmussen, 1976:72).

Cash was saved by providing one's own dental care as well. For example, Peggy Holmes described how a neighbouring farm woman pulled her own and probably her children's teeth in an attempt to economize on such expenses (Holmes, 1980:97,99). Many women also provided hair-cutting services for their families. One informant recalled that during the 1920's and 1930's, when she was a young girl, "all the hair cutting was done by mother" (V.W.p.c.).

Women's clothes manufacturing was also aimed at restraining family expenditure. For example, F.D. remarked:

Women ordered clothes from Eatons. It certainly did make life easier for women, but, of course, you still bought material to sew and yarn to knit. You didn't buy everything ready-made just because it was in the catalogue! You couldn't afford that! Shoes, you got them the same way as cloth [through the catalogue] but I sometimes made shoes for the little ones (p.c.).

J.T., related, similarly:

I bought material from Eatons, through the catalogue from Winnipeg, for a few dollars, and then YOU make everything; boy's underwear, boys' pants, boys' shirts; socks. You don't go and buy, you MAKE everything! (p.c.)

Many families economized further by sharing clothes and altering hand-me-downs. Particularly children's clothes and shoes were handed down from one family to another. F.G. told me:

I used to get clothes given to me and cut them down and make them all for the kids [in the 1920's and 1930's].

F.K. related:

I always did my own sewing; "necessity is the mother of invention", and I altered clothes, especially winter coats. I always altered hand-downs [for the kids]. We were always able to cope (p.c.).

The use of flour and sugar bags and second-hand materials was an additional income-conserving strategy. In group interviews, older informants recalled that, during the 1920's and 1930's,

We used flour bags to make pillowcases, sheets, teatowels, diapers, children's underwear and baby's sheets. You had to get the print (lettering) out first [and you had] to bleach it to make it white or dye it to get a colour (Winnipeg group interview, p.c.).

But look at the things we used to make out of flour bags [in the 1920's and 1930's]. And we had to rub and scrub those things to get the print out first. Sheet and pillowcases we made, and teatowels, slips and even

bloomers. Yes, it wasn't funny (Rathwell group interview, p.c.).

In marginal areas the use of this income-conserving strategy went beyond undergarments and linen and included outergarments as well. In addition, materials produced on the farm like wool and hemp were used as much as possible to reduce spending. The local history of Fisher Branch contains a number of family histories which illustrate this. For example, the family history of Polly Hnatiuk who raised ten children between the 1920s and 1940s, revealed that:

Most of the clothes were made at home from dyed or bleached flour and sugar bags. These home-tailored garments included everything from underwear to "Sunday best". Wool was corded by hand and yarn was spun on spinning wheels. This yarn was used for knitting stockings and mittens for the whole family (Fisher Branch, 1982:179).

In another family history, Mrs. Annie Huta recalled how she coped with the need to clothe six children between the 1920's and 1950's:

If anybody had hard times, we sure did ... We barely had enough to live on. I used to knit all the socks, sweaters, and scarves for all the children. sewed clothes from printed flour bags; the white flour bags I used to dye red, yellow, and blue, and make shirts or dresses (Fisher Branch, 1982:190).

H.C. mentioned that his mother manufactured overalls and shirts out of sugar bags because bag material was "sturdier for heavy cleaning and livestock tasks" (p.c.). Work clothes had to be manufactured frequently and the use of sugar bags restrained expenditures on store-bought clothing materials, especially when cash was hard to come by.

The use of flour and sugar bags for manufacturing outergarments to be worn in public places like schools or churches, indicates the severity of financial hardships in marginal areas and the lengths to which women went to restrain expenditures. J.H. of Niverville, a prosperous farm area, confirmed this. She noted:

The 1930's were bad times but my family wasn't as bad off. We used sugar and flour bags for teatowels, but some people used them for clothing (J.H.p.c.).

An additional income-conserving strategy employed by farm women across the province was the use of feathers for making pillows and comforters. Informants from the Red River valley area related: "We made our own pillows out of sugar sacks and feathers of geese and other fowl" (Winnipeg group interview, p.c.). Michael Stasyshyn from Stuartburn recalled:

[I] went hunting ... wild ducks. This was a great help for we had meat and mother plucked the ducks and we had feathers to make pillows (published in: Ewanchuk, 1981:16).

Women economized by making quilts as well:

The quilts were mostly made of leftovers, scraps from dresses and aprons or of heavy patches taken from worn out trousers, suits or even underwear ... The interlining was often of sheep's wool grown on the farm and prepared ahead of time (Minnedosa, 1958:153).

By pooling their labour in cooperative bees like feather-plucking and quilting bees, farm women were able to economize on commercial services when carrying out big jobs like plucking dozens of birds.\* For example, several informants noted:

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\* These bees were socializing opportunities for many farm women as well. Informants noted the "fun times" experienced at them

[We] did things together in groups. Like, when we plucked the turkeys and geese. The neighbours would come and help or you would go there. We had turkey-picking bees and everyone would go there ... The feathers were used for pillows or comforters (Winnipeg group interview, p.c.).

Cooperation between women in the manufacture of essential subsistence needs bolstered family standards of living under good and poor economic conditions. For example, on pioneer farmsteads in Minnedosa,

Winters were cold and the log houses not too warm so much warm bedding was needed. The women ... gathered as soon after the noon meal as possible, some even coming in the morning to help 'set up' the quilt (Minnedosa, 1958:152-153).

In the same fashion, farm women organized chicken showers to help new settlers economize on the expense of starting a poultry flock and help out those who had lost their flock to frost or predation. Even today, cooperative arrangements exist. For example, many farm women cut and wrap beef or pork together or organize pie-baking bees for big events like weddings and funerals instead of relying on the expensive services of butchers and bakers (N.J.,O.L. p.c.).

Anthropologist Seena B. Kohl's comments on the variety and income-conserving nature of "work exchanges" between farm families in southwestern Saskatchewan confirm my observations. She wrote (1976:43):

[Relatively informal] work groups, dependent upon proximity and perceived self-interest emerge between neighbors. These dyadic relationships are termed "neighboring", and serve an important function in a

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(Winnipeg group interview, p.c.).



region where the cash for labor is in short supply.

In summary, farm women carried out a number of individual and cooperative services and produced a variety of goods which, when farm incomes were low, were aimed at economizing on household expenses and maintaining family standards of living. Women's veterinary, medical and sewing services were highlighted. The production of goods like medicine, clothes, linen, pillows and quilts were noted as well.

#### 5.2.4 Field Work

Farm women carried out field work when hired help was unaffordable. Their participation in commercial grain production economized on labour expenses when farm income was minimal.

In the marginal areas of the province, lack of income to hire help was a chronic problem. In addition, material conditions on the farm generally forced husbands and teenaged children to seek employment off the farm, leaving women with the bulk of all farm work. Historical sources document this. The local history of Fisher Branch reported:

In summer the men hired out for threshing ... The women stayed home, cutting grain with a sickle, tying sheaves with bands of grain, later hauling and stacking them neatly in the yard (1982:335).

Similarly, the local history of Pine River recorded:

When the settlers arrived here they had very little or no source of income. The men and older children went to work wherever there was a job (1982:22).

My dad ... left mother with the children on the farm. She had to look after the farm by herself, as the children were too small to help (1982:114).

Several informants who have always had to carry out field work under these circumstances, described the tasks they performed and how their labour contributed to the farm operation. R.N. related that lack of money to hire help not only necessitated her field-work involvement on her own farm but also on that of her parents-in-law. She said:

I drove the tractor and I drove the binder. I stooked too. We worked half a section; one quarter was ours and the other quarter was [my husband's] dad's. After [my husband] finished cutting our quarter, he went to his dad's land to cut. Then I had to stook our quarter. I had to do that. Nobody else was there to help. [My husband] also used to leave a truck full of grain by the granary and he went threshing for his dad. And I had to empty that whole truck into the granary with a shovel. I also had to pitch sheaves during threshing time if there weren't enough men around (R.N.p.c.).

In addition to not being able to afford hired help, the employment of R.N.'s husband off the farm to earn extra income, meant that she often had to do more than her share of the farm work, which included looking after all the livestock. This was also the case with her daughter, D.T., who told me that she performed a lot of the field work when her husband was away because, "we couldn't hire someone, so I had to do it" (p.c.). When she married her husband in the early 1960s, she did "whatever needed to be done; stone picking, stooking, threshing, pitching sheaves, and haying" (p.c.).

Like R.N. and D.T., informants O.L. and C.T. have always participated in all commercial aspects of the farm due to the inability to hire help and the absence of their husbands from the

farm. They farmed actively until the early 1980s when their husbands' regular pension cheques allowed them to become semi-retired. O.L. related the following about her direct involvement in field work:

He [husband] was cultivating and harrowing [preparing grain field for seeding] and I used to bring out the grain [seed] with the tractor and the box [to the field]. And, I used to mix the fertilizer in the grain in the [seed] drill because we didn't have a fertilizer attachment.

He [husband] used to cut [the grain] with a binder since we got married. And I used to stook. We also cut for his [husband's] brother and I don't know how many other places. After stooking we threshed. I was with him [husband]. I was the pitcher. And I was pitching for his brother and for another guy. I was their best pitcher! Pitching was done by fork, you had to put the sheaves on the rack. So, for about twenty different falls in a row I was threshing with the men. We threshed with one outfit and then with another. I drove the tractor and hauled [straw]bales and, then, I would come home to do the chores [milking cows and feeding pigs], or I would do them in the morning and go out threshing.

We threshed until fifteen years ago [1970]. We didn't have our own outfit. His [husband's] brother had it [together] with this neighbour. [When we worked on their farms] we weren't making money; we were just working off our threshing bill.

I always helped outside first and leave the inside work, because it is inside. I helped with the outside work because that is more important. He owes me a lot because I helped with everything. He always says "I did it", but we always did it [farm work] together (O.L.p.c.).

O.L.'s farm labour economized on operating expenses in many ways. Apart from saving the wages otherwise paid to hired help, her participation, especially in threshing, helped pay off the threshing bill in kind rather than in cash.

In the case of C.T., almost all field work was done by her alone. C.T.'s husband, U.T., who participated in part of the interview, related that between 1946 and 1961 he "worked in construction" (U.T.p.c.). He would only come home every other weekend, leaving his wife in charge of the farm. C.T. recalled the following about this period in her life.

While U. worked in construction I farmed on my own. After the kids were sleeping I used to plough and everything for him [husband] often until three in the morning. I often took the kids with me to the field during the day as well. When U. came home on the second weekends, he'd do the odds and ends on the farm. He would plough the ends [corners] in and he straightened out things (C.T.p.c.).

The examples illustrating women's labour input in commercial work processes within marginal areas contrast sharply with the gradual withdrawal of women's input in field work in prosperous areas. Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that even in the more prosperous farm areas of the province, women had to perform tasks related to field-crop production from time to time. At a group interview in Rathwell, informants mentioned having worked as young daughters and, later, as wives in the grain and hay fields. Especially during the 1920's and 1930's when "you couldn't afford to hire help" (F.W.p.c.), they participated in various farm work processes to economize on labour expenses. F.G. remembered hauling grain and putting it in the granaries after she married in 1925 (F.G.p.c.). Her peer F.W. also recalled hauling grain while S.S., who was a young girl during the Depression, recalled:

We had no hired help. The family did everything ...  
Mother never worked with the threshing machine in the

field but she made hay. We all did. And we all stooked out in the field too. Dad did the seeding, but we helped to clean the seed. That was done at home with a cleaning mill that you had to turn the handle all day (S.S.p.c.).

At a group interview in Winnipeg, informants also stressed that, during the 1930's, "women helped with everything, especially stooking" (Winnipeg group interview, p.c.). Some women were also said to have helped with harrowing and mowing. During the Second World War, women continued to work in the fields due to a lack of males to run the field equipment (p.c.).

The major difference between women's field labour in the prime and marginal areas was the fact that in the prime areas, women's direct involvement in field work was generally of a temporary nature. With the exception of economic recessions, the trend toward gender-role segregation continued in prosperous farm areas. In marginal farm areas, the trend toward gender-role segregation did not develop to the same extent as it did in the prosperous farm areas. Women's direct field-work involvement remained crucial on an ongoing basis.

In summary, whether women's direct field-work involvement was of a temporary or an ongoing nature, under conditions of financial strain, women served as a labour reserve on the farm. Their labour input in field work helped economize on labour expenses when income conservation was of utmost importance in making ends meet.

#### 5.2.5 Country Provisions for Family Use

On early pioneer farms, families relied on the utilization of country provisions to supplement subsistence needs produced on the farm. It was an essential component of the overall survival strategy of settlers. On established farms, especially in the marginal, secondary settlement areas, families suffering from cash shortages continued to use country provisions to economize on household expenses and to cope with otherwise low standards of living. This is evident from the family history of the Obzarski's who settled, with little money, in the Interlake in 1908:

Covers [bed covers] were made with a filling of feathers from the prairie chickens, which were killed for meat ... For food, prairie chicken and rabbits were the main meat for summer, with moose and deer meat in winter ... Salve was made from the gall and lard of the animals killed. Skunk lard was the best healer ... A special treat was high-bush cranberries which were abundant in the woods. They were cooked, and when sugar was available, were made into jam ... Mushrooms were pickled in crocks in a vinegar mixture for added variety in the meals. Dandelion wine was made by most people ... Soap was made from the fats from deer, moose, etc., mixed with lye ... Until people began to raise sheep, no one had any wool to be spun and knitted, so, of course, no one had socks or stockings to wear ... tanned rabbit skins were wrapped around the feet (Fisher Branch, 1982:280-284)

In many farm families, game and fowl were staple foods consumed on a daily basis and prepared by women in different ways so as to add variety to the diet.

One of our main dishes was rabbits. There was fried rabbit, stewed rabbit, rabbit ground into hamburger, smoked rabbit and rabbit everywhere, winter or summer (Wilhelmina Taphorn Memoir published in Robertson, 1974:62).

When acute cash shortages forced men to find off-farm wage labour, a situation common in the marginal areas, women caught game themselves. For example, the family history of Ewan and Maria Nakonechny who farmed in Pine River, reported the following:

Ewan used to walk for miles to try and get work to earn money leaving Mary to take care of the children and do the chores. Mary would catch rabbits and prairie chickens for food to feed her family (Pine River, 1982:152-153).

By utilizing wildlife, women minimized cash spending on buying dietary essentials like meat while, at the same time, maintaining the well-being of the farm household through high quality nutrition. Livestock-replacement costs were minimized too by eliminating or reducing the need to slaughter farm animals. The local history of Rapid City commented, for example,

Cattle were too valuable for milk and as oxen to be used for food ... Fortunately there was no closed season on prairie chicken, wild duck and rabbit (Rapid City, 1978:161).

In addition to providing the farm household with basic subsistence needs and traction power, farm livestock represented a capital asset in that the sale of livestock or livestock products generated cash and other material resources.

In the era of commercial farming, the continuing exploitation of country provisions served the purpose of economizing on household expenses. When recurring boom-bust cycles destabilized the farm economy, farmsteads, particularly those in prime areas who had reduced their reliance on country provisions as a result

of rising prosperity levels, returned to this resource-conserving strategy. Informants from primary settlement areas referred to the use of country provisions during the depression of the 1930s when commercial fruits like apples, oranges, bananas or raisins were luxuries. Store-bought fruit could only be had when the family budget allowed for such expenses. F.G. explained that women used wild fruit to make jams, jellies and pies:

We did a lot of wild fruit picking and preserving. Cranberries and chokecherries for jelly. Also wild raspberries and strawberries. Saskatoons, too. We used to preserve them and put them in sealers ... And another thing I did: instead of raisins, because you couldn't buy [afford] them, I put the saskatoons in the cake instead of the raisins (F.G.p.c.).

For some farm women the utilization of country provisions has been an ongoing resource-conserving strategy until the present day. This is particularly the case with women who live on marginal farms and who have grown up with a tradition of economizing on household needs to make ends meet. For example, M.V. and O.L., both of whom farm on the southern slopes of the Riding Mountains, continue to make pies and jams from wild fruit, even now that a greater variety of fresh and canned fruit have become available through local stores. Another informant, C.T. from the Interlake, told me that hunting and fishing are important dietary supplements on her family farm. She cleans the wild fowl and large game and prepares the meat for the freezer or processes it into sausages. She smokes, pickles or makes breaded paddies from fish. A lot of the fish, wild fowl and large game is preserved for winter use which, she remarked, keeps her domestic expenses down considerably.



In summary, women's work with respect to supplementing family subsistence needs with country provisions economized on household expenditures and buffered against low standards of living. This was particularly evident during depressions and in areas characterized by marginal farm conditions.

#### 5.2.6 Subsistence production

In the early decades of commercial farming, the production of subsistence needs on the farm was an important means of economizing on household expenses. F.D., who was ninety-two years of age at the time of our interview, explained, for example, that subsistence production in the early 1900s was necessary since there was a shortage of cash. "People didn't have cash; they just made do", she said. She stressed that meat and other foodstuffs were rarely purchased (F.D.p.c.). Similarly, R.N. noted that in the summertime, people rarely ate meat. Instead, they ate cream, cottage cheese and eggs. Farm livestock, she said, was too precious to slaughter and meat was too expensive to purchase (R.N.p.c.).

Women played a key role in economizing through subsistence production. For example, M.V. asserted that the coming of stores carrying basic consumer items did not change her baking, dairying, canning and sewing routines. She continued to produce all family food needs on the farm (M.V.p.c.). Like M.V., informant O.L., who has always produced all family food needs on the farm, related that she has never spent any money on buying

poultry products, beef, pork, milk, butter, cheese, bread or vegetables. In fact, O.L., like most farm women of her time, not only continued to provide for family subsistence needs but actually expanded her food-provisioning efforts to incorporate the needs of a growing, farm work force. She raised two hundred chickens a year to feed family and threshers (O.L.p.c.).

Family provisioning has always been particularly important in times of economic downturns. It helped secure family survival when farm income from commercial pursuits was lacking. Several informants who experienced the 1930s, vividly recalled the economic hardships and generally asserted that the production of subsistence needs on the farm enabled their families to "ride out the bad times" (Winnipeg and Rathwell group interviews, p.c.).

Interviewees from the Rathwell area related:

The trouble [was] there was so much work and you didn't get nothing for it [low prices for agricultural products]. You had to work so hard just to eat three meals a day ... We were short on cash [but] you had all your fresh vegetables ... Once winter come, you ate up what you had canned ... you couldn't afford to buy anything like that (Rathwell group interview, p.c.).

J.T. of the Swan River Valley recalled that "when the depression [1930s] came, we had something to eat, like milk and potatoes". She fed her family of seven children from her garden in which she grew pumpkins, corn, beets, carrots, rhubarb, tomatoes and potatoes. She also made her own butter and raised her own chickens, ducks and some pigs for family consumption (J.T.p.c.).

In summary, women played an important role in filling family needs without drawing on cash income. Moreover, by meeting the additional subsistence needs of farm labourers, women's provisioning activities further contributed to the commercial component by restraining extra expenditures.

### 5.3 WOMEN'S INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES

Farm women employed numerous strategies to generate income. They sought employment on a wage or contract basis, they marketed country provisions and a variety of farm products and, finally, they engaged in a number of cottage industries.

#### 5.3.1 Paid Labour

Several informants mentioned having been involved in paid labour to earn extra income when times were particularly hard. Invariably, these informants came from marginal areas. R.T., who farmed on the southern slopes of the Riding Mountains, related how, after her marriage in 1913, she used to hire herself out for twenty-five cents a day to plaster homes and tend gardens. Together with her husband, she also used to "pile brush and clear land for seven dollars per acre", (R.T.p.c.). A peer, G.W., who farmed on the eastern slopes of the Duck Mountains, used to supplement family income from the farm and her husband's off-farm job by doing "farm work for fifty cents a day" (p.c.). Similarly, Julia Ruta who farmed near Cook's Creek in southeastern Manitoba, related:

Often I used to leave the children in the neighbour's care and went hoeing for farmers in Oakbank. I would earn \$1.00 a day, but often, less (published in Ewanchuk, 1981:155).

Notwithstanding these examples, data suggest that the most likely group of female household members to seek off-farm employment were teenaged daughters. Female heads of households were less likely to do so because of labour constraints at home.

#### 5.3.2 Sale of Country Provisions

Many women combined the income-generating and income-conserving aspects of the utilization of country provisions. For example, F.G. told me:

We [the women] used to get pails and pails of saskatoons; great big milk pails and we'd sell them for a dollar per pail. The ones you didn't sell, you'd can them.

Similarly, many women who utilized game for family consumption prepared the skins for sale when cash was needed urgently. H.C.'s mother, who processed jack rabbits into stews and pates, sold the skins to earn extra income (H.C.p.c.).

During the pioneer era, wild fruit and skins were bartered or sold at the local store for goods. For example, the Hrynkiw family of the Pine River area "exchanged [wild berries] at the store for yards of material which were made into dresses" (Pine River, 1982:118). Informant O.L. recalled likewise that, "when I was still at home, I knew a woman, well, even my mother took raspberries to the store" (O.L.p.c.). The local history of

Fisher Branch reported that hides were traded at the local store (Fisher Branch, 1982:14). Similarly, the family history of Pine River's first storekeeper noted: "we traded fur skins, eggs and butter from customers in exchange for household supplies and clothing (Pine River, 1982:127). Some farm women also sold their products to private customers. For example, the women who lived in the Gimli District sold fresh wild fruit to tourists in the summer resorts along Lake Winnipeg (Ewanchuk, 1977:66).

During the 1930s, the income derived from selling country provisions was a crucial supplement to other income. This is evident from the family history of Mrs. Ann Zembiak:

Life was not easy as the depression years had set in and money was extremely scarce. Ann continued to strive for survival by picking wild raspberries and selling them at one dollar per pail ... (Pine River, 1982:222).

Informants from Rathwell also related that they and their mothers sold wild fruit during the 1930s when farm income was particularly low (Rathwell group interview, p.c.).

Whereas the sale of wild fruit and skins generally boosted family income when extra cash was needed, the sale of cordwood and seneca or 'snake' roots\* constituted the mainstay on many farms located primarily in marginal areas where these resources were available in abundance.

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\* These roots were used for medicinal purposes. North-American Indians used snake roots as a remedy against snakebite.

Contrary to the common notion that only men were involved in the cordwood industry, women were active participants in many of the tasks comprising this work process. This is illustrated in the following examples. The family history of Anastasia Antonchuk in the local history of Fisher Branch reported (1982:65):

Dad and Mom had to work very hard cutting cordwood, which they exchanged for food and clothing for the family ... My parents were still cutting cordwood [after several years], as this was their only means of income for the sugar and flour which had to be bought.

The family history of the Luty's reported (1982:233):

Mr. Luty and his wife always cut cordwood during the winter months in order to earn a few extra dollars to buy groceries. Mrs. Luty would help load and when her husband would take the cords home or to deliver them to the dealer, she would stay behind and cut more cordwood [sic].

O.L. told me about her involvement in the cordwood industry after she married.

I helped him to take the wood out; hauling from up north. He was eighteen years in the bush. For four months of every winter I was alone here. He'd come home on a Saturday and go back on Sunday. I split wood by moonlight [after all other chores were completed]. I always made sure I had that pile of wood split he had sawed before he left. It had to be done by spring and he was only home on the weekends so I did it (O.L.p.c.).

In pockets of marginal farm land within primary settlement areas, cordwood cutting was also an important income-generating activity and, here too, women participated. The local history of Rathwell recorded with respect to the relatively poor French settlers who farmed near Notre Dame de Lourdes:

The men worked in the bush and the women drew the wood to town with oxen. They worked hard piling and unpling and then they knitted coming and going, most times walking behind the load (1970:333).

Many farm families depended heavily on the sale of cordwood during the 1930s when prices for farm products were depressed. In the marginal areas, where the effects of the Depression were harshest, men and women intensified their cordwood-cutting activities to survive a declining farm economy. The local history of Riding Mountain, for example, recorded that, "During the 'dirty thirties', Riding Mountain was known as Cordwood Town" (1984:46).

Many of the families who cut cordwood in the winter as an income-generating strategy dug seneca roots in the summer to augment income. The family history of the Malenchak's who farmed in the Interlake reported, for example,

In winter, the men, with wives helping, cut cordwood and hauled it to be sold in town. In summer, all spare time was spent digging seneca roots at twenty-five cents a pound (Fisher Branch, 1983:239).

Digging seneca roots was often a family activity in which husband, wife and children participated together. O.L. told me:

We dug seneca roots for a living too back home. I did and my mother did. We had a bag around the waist; the whole family, my dad and all my sisters too.

The family history of Mr. and Mrs. Lewycky documents that,

They picked seneca roots and berries which they sold and saved the money to buy a farm ... (Pine River, 1982:145).

Seneca roots were usually sold at the local store to obtain ready cash. In some instances, the income earned could be quite considerable.

There are many examples in the archival sources of women carrying out the work processes involved in digging and marketing seneca roots by themselves, without the aid of men. The local history of Fisher Branch contains several family histories which make reference to this. For example, Mrs. Mary Kalyta recalled:

My husband kept on clearing land and I went digging seneca roots. Once I sold my roots for sixty-six dollars. That was alot of money (Fisher Branch, 1982:200).

Mrs. Jaman from Sirko in southeastern Manitoba recalled:

Some years ... we would run short of flour. Once when my husband started haying, I left the smaller children in the care of the older girls and went seneca root picking to earn some money. Another woman and her daughter and I went several miles across the Canadian-U.S.A. line and dug seneca roots. We packed them into bags and they made a heavy load as they were green ... I took the roots to the store and was able to get two bags of flour, some sugar, salt and soap in trade. This lasted us for about two weeks and I had to go back again to get more roots (1981:170-171).

In summary, the two most important country provisions were cordwood and senecaroots. During times when farm income was minimal or absent altogether, the sale of such land-based products was often the mainstay. In many of the marginal farm areas of the province income generation through the marketing of country provisions continued on until well into the present century.



### 5.3.3 Marketing Farm Products

During the early years of farm commercialization and in times of depression when farm income from wheat was minimal, the sale of a variety of other farm products like vegetables, poultry, eggs, wool, honey, and milk could be the most important source of income. This was particularly the case on less prosperous farms in marginal areas. Women played a major role in producing and marketing the products of mixed farming. Rasmussen wrote in this regard that:

The sales of her poultry, butter and eggs were often an important source of income during the first debt-burdened seasons on a homestead, and one of the few reliable sources for years to come (Rasmussen, 1976:43 emphasis added).

Many women extended the scope of their subsistence-production work processes in order to produce a surplus which could be marketed.\* Ellis pointed out that

most farm families kept relatively small flocks of hens and chickens for subsistence or domestic use ... [In] many cases, eggs and dressed poultry, along with dairy butter, were [also] used by farm wives in barter for goods obtained in country-town and village stores (Ellis, 1971:513).

The relative distance to domestic markets played an important role in women's marketing activities. For example, in the early decades of this century, Interlake pioneer women who lived near Gimli benefitted from a nearby market in the summer resorts at Lake Winnipeg. Ewanchuk wrote:

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\* The intensification of the domestic and barnyard-related work processes to produce a marketable surplus, no doubt, acted as an additional pull factor in the trend towards women's non-participation in fieldwork.

Farm women who lived closer to town were able to deliver their produce fresh and cool to the steady customers they had. Most of the women delivered their produce bi-weekly: on Wednesdays and Saturdays ... As farmers acquired horses, they [women] drove into Gimli and other summer resort places for a distance of ten miles and more (Ewanchuk, 1977:224-225).

[They] delivered their garden produce, cream, butter and poultry, and sold these goods to the "campers". They brought their goods in wagons drawn by oxen or buggies pulled by one horse. Those who lived farther away continued to bring their produce by carrying huge bundles on their backs. Young children, boys and girls, assisted their mothers in carrying quart jars of berries, baskets of eggs and pails of new potatoes (1977:66).

Ewanchuk noted that, through her marketing activities, "the farmer's wife was able to improve the farm income to a marked degree" (1977:255). In fact, he observed that farm families who lived near Gimli "were doing better as they were closer to markets where they could sell their farm produce" (1977:224). In contrast, families who did not have local markets nearby and did not possess draft animals to make remote markets accessible had much higher rates of farm failure. These observations support the argument that farm women's incomes were essential in making ends meet on the farm.

Individual case studies from across the province illustrate the crucial role played by women's financial contributions to farm establishment and defraying the high cost of farming. Mary Basay related:

We [she and her husband] saved money and in 1919 bought an eighty-acre farm north of Dauphin for \$1,800.00, paying \$600.00 down and taking a mortgage ... The interest rates on our mortgage were so high that the payments and the taxes took all our earnings. When the hens started laying, I used to take a few dozen eggs to the store and buy some groceries (published in Ewanchuk, 1981:102-104).

Mary Basay's income-generating activity, selling eggs, helped secure the farm title by contributing indirectly to paying off the mortgage while safeguarding her family's standard of living given their severely limited disposable income.

Like in the case of Mary Basay, F.D.'s cash contributions through the sale of poultry products were essential in consolidating the farm and supporting the family. She related that during the first ten years (between 1914 and the mid 1920s) she and her husband were paying off the purchase price of the farm.

We worked together on the farm. It was just a ten-year contract and we managed to pay each year. We bought the farm in ten years ... We had eggs and chickens which was almost our main thing for a while, because we only had this quarter section so we couldn't have a lot of cattle [to make a living with]. We had three hundred hens or so. We had an incubator which we called the "little grey hen" and kept it indoors. We experimented with it. It was just a tub-size with a lamp in the center and it held about fifty eggs. We kept the incubator in the bedroom because you had to watch the lamp. We had a utility room in which we kept the small chicks. We did not do this in wintertime; mostly in summertime when the roads were open and the storekeeper would take our eggs in. We also sold friers. I killed and cleaned them. I sold them for twenty-five cents each in the 1930s. It was just a little cash, yet it made a difference. My husband didn't help with the cleaning; he drew the line there (F.D.p.c.).

Apart from earning cash through the sale of poultry products, F.D. also sold her surplus vegetables on occasion and bartered her surplus butter at the country store for groceries. In later years she sold small amounts of cream. Although she commented that grain sales financed the farm it is nevertheless evident that the income from selling dressed poultry, eggs and a few

other farm products indirectly financed the purchase of the farm. It financed the household expenses and made it possible for all grain returns to be invested in paying off the debt.

Other examples of women's financial contributions to farming include the sale of hogs and cattle in order to meet immediate cash needs when tax payments came up or when threshing and other operating bills were due. Since farm women were involved in the raising of large livestock, their role in this income-generating activity is evident. This was particularly the case in marginal areas where many women farmed on their own when husbands were absent due to off-farm employment or cutting wood. For example, R.N., who related that her husband "was never at home", did most chores involving the care of eight sows and raising weanlings for market. R.T., from the same area, the southern slopes of the Riding Mountains, related that her parents did not usually sell any livestock but, when taxes had to be paid or some other expense became pressing, a cow or another farm animal was sold. Since her mother looked after the livestock both in the summer when her father worked as a thresher on southern farms and in the winter when he was cutting wood in the bush, the marketing of farm animals to meet immediate cash needs was really her mother's financial contribution. Similarly, H.C., whose parents farmed on poor land near Notre Dame de Lourdes, related that, in order to pay the threshing bill each year, "we sold what we could, like cows and grain and we cut wood and sold cordwood" (H.C.p.c.). H.C.'s mother had about ten milk cows which she looked after by

herself. The sale of one or more of her cows was a crucial cash contribution to the operating costs of the farm.

Many farm women probably sold milk as an income-generating activity. During my fieldwork, I found very little historical information on this aspect of farm dairying.\* Informants did not generally mention it yet the fact that most local histories note the existence of a cheese factory in town during the early years of settlement suggests that milking for cash was practiced. The local history of Rapid City, in fact, provides strong indication that whole milk was an item for sale to cheese factories.

The first industry in the Moline district was "The Hampton Cheese Factory" established in 1891 ... The factory was centrally located. As the settlers moved in and started farming one of their necessities was to own one or more cows. The farmers delivered their excess milk to the factory and received credit and payment at regular intervals. Cheese was a very important part of their diet so when required a family would take home 'a cheese' ... The cost of the cheese would be deducted from that families credit for milk (Rapid City, 1978:148).

In summary, women marketed several farm products which were related to their subsistence production. Eggs, poultry and garden produce were most common. The marketing of these products was most important in marginal areas but took on added significance in prime agricultural areas during economic downturns.

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\* More research into the marketing of whole milk would be useful.

#### 5.3.4 Cottage Industries

Many women boosted family income by marketing value-added products. For example, on some farms women undertook the manufacture of clothes and other articles as a cottage industry. Mrs. Edith Gibson wrote in her family history that her mother made financial contributions to farm and family by making "dresses and hats for her new found friends" (Rathwell, 1970:237). Similarly, R.T. used to sew "for everyone in the district", and made shirts for men which she sold for twenty-five cents each (R.T.p.c.). The money went towards paying the groceries. Several farm women also made pillows, quilts, tablecloths and the like for sale. M.K.'s mother, for example, sold her crocheted articles. The income was spent on household needs (M.K.p.c.).

Many women were also involved in the marketing of value-added products like processed meats and vegetables which generated higher returns than the sale of raw foods. For example, some women bartered or sold processed pork. Mrs. Bell's account of farm life around 1880 in and near Rathwell testifies to this practice. She noted that country stores accepted salted pork in exchange for groceries (Rathwell, 1970:114). An informant whose parents lived in a rural town during the Depression, mentioned that her mother used to buy canned chicken from a farm woman (V.W.p.c.). Another informant, C.T., related that she and her husband "killed and cleaned a pig for private customers sometimes to make extra money" (p.c.).

Some women were involved in baking to generate income or a return of services in kind. For example, Nellie McClung's mother baked for a neighbour who reciprocated with carpentry. She also appears to have manufactured medicine which she sold to neighbours or bartered for services in return. McClung's autobiography suggests that her mother made 'Balm of Gilead' salve for a nearby bachelor (1935:125).

The exchange of services was a common phenomenon in the past. Money was a major resource needed by beginning and expanding farmsteaders but labour too, was an indispensable resource in farming. The production of goods and services by women in return for labour services needs to be viewed as a significant in-kind contribution to farm development.

Two cottage industries which were carried out on a large scale were buttermaking and, later, cream production. Butter designated for market was packed in tubs and, in more recent times, in one-pound butter prints. Butter meant for home consumption or private customers was usually packed in crocks. This aspect of the buttermaking work process is described in the next quote, an excerpt from the article entitled "Pioneer Women and Butter" by pioneer woman Emma Carlson, published in the local history of Erickson.

Butter for market was packed in wooden tubs that could be had in various sizes. These were usually well soaked in water to "draw" out any taste of wood, but, in spite of that, the butter could take on the flavor if stored in them for any length of time ... [With] the one-pound wooden butter print and waxed butter paper now available, ... butter tubs had had their day ... Clay crocks were also available. They were ideal

for packing butter, both for home use and private customers. Many a five- or ten-pound crock of butter found its way directly from the farm to the town kitchen. If butter was well washed and worked free of buttermilk and evenly salted, packed in a crock and covered with a layer of salt or an inch of strong brine, the summer's bounty could be well preserved for the bleaker days of fall and winter. The storekeepers welcomed the printed butter. They soon learned where the best butter came from and were known to set it aside for their own use and for favoured customers. The ladies producing it were the uncrowned dairy queens of their day (Erickson, 1984:47-58).

Butter was probably the most important farm product bartered and sold by farm women in the pioneer period. Ellis noted that

in addition to supplying their own table requirements, it was a well established custom with many settlers or, more specifically, the settlers' wives to milk a few cows and to make butter in amounts sufficient to trade or pay (in whole or in part) for family purchases at the local store (1971:144).

[When] and where a surplus of cream over family requirements was produced, such surplus in the earlier years was used to produce homemade butter for barter at country stores or, in later years, to be shipped as cream to creameries - a practice on which many farm women depended for cash income (1971:620).

As is indicated by the last quote in particular, the production and marketing of butter was especially important in the early days of settlement. This is confirmed by the local history of Rathwell which reported that:

In the years, just after 1900, there was no shipping of cream in those days, as there were no creameries in the small towns. Most of the farm ladies made butter and packed it in crocks or butter tubs and traded it in to the local storekeeper for supplies (Rathwell, 1970: 323).

In many instances, the returns on butter, which was often marketed together with eggs, were essential in making ends meet



on the farm. This is illustrated by the diary notes of Mrs. St. John. She and her husband arrived on a Saskatchewan homestead in April, 1902 and had little money, only \$2.35, and very few belongings; just some furniture and livestock. Income from the sale of grain was not forthcoming within the first year since the land needed to be broken and cultivated first. Yet, they were in need of building, farming and household supplies. Considering the overall economic situation of the St. Johns, Mrs. St. John's seemingly minor commercial activities in producing butter and eggs take on major economic significance. Note, for example, the following notations in her diary:

1902

April 16 ... I churn two lbs. of butter, gather two eggs ...

April 29 ... churn two lbs. of butter, gather eight eggs - our income is improving.

May 19 ... Men get home [from shopping] 7:30 p.m. They sold my eggs for 80 cents, and brought me a butter bowl for 50 cents and 25 cents' worth of muslim.

June 17 First chickens hatched - hen was set May 27.

1903

January 2 Wash, and churn six lbs. of butter. Hens are laying two eggs a day.

January 12 Nice winter day. Seward and Otto go to Milestone for groceries, I send 10 lbs. of butter to trade for our needs.

February 11 ... I churn four lbs. butter and iron.

March 30 ... churn three lbs. butter, gather 14 eggs (published in Robertson, 1974:74-77).

It is evident from Mrs. St. John's diary notations that her income-generating activities gradually expanded as circumstances allowed.

Examples from Manitoba illustrate a similar economic dependence on the sale of butter. F.W. related, for instance, that in the "old days" she and her mother made butter on the farm from the milk of twelve cows. She said:

That's what we lived on. We made butter and sold the butter and eggs to buy the groceries (F.W.p.c.).

Similarly, F.G. said, "We really depended on the products we could sell like butter, eggs and cream" (p.c.).

The dependence on the sale of butter and eggs takes on new significance when placed within the context of the economic conditions of the time. For example, F.W. related that her parents experienced "bad times" during the 1920s and, even more so, in the 1930s. Her father made so little money on grain that there "wasn't even enough money to pay his taxes". In fact, most of the time there was not enough grain to sell at all (F.W.p.c.).

Most informants indicated that the returns on women's farm products like butter and eggs paid for the groceries. However, while this was perhaps the most common allocation of farm women's cash incomes, some women are known to have produced far more than was necessary for the purchase of family provisions. For example, an anonymous farm woman wrote how she produced one hundred pounds of butter per week for market (published in Rasmussen, 1976:52). It is likely that income from this amount of butter was far in excess of weekly costs of purchased family provisions.

Marketing activities probably took place most successfully in rural districts that were relatively close to developing urban centers like Winnipeg, Brandon, Rapid City, Minnedosa and so on. These growing cities served as a large market for agricultural products. Farm women living close to these markets could expand

their production processes into relatively large-scale operations. This was evidenced, for example, by one of my informants, J.H., a farm woman from a historically prosperous farm district just south of Winnipeg, who noted her grandmother's financial involvement in the growth of her farm.

My grandparents came to Manitoba from Eastern Canada in the 1880s. Grandmother ran the entire business [on their new farmstead]. Grandfather only worked in the field. Grandmother milked, creamed and made butter. She also redid bad butter from [neighbouring] women which she bought cheaply. She then hauled it into Winnipeg with the teamster. Eggs too. She also bought up eggs in the neighbourhood and then sold them in Winnipeg. She made enough money to buy a half section [320 acres] of land and expand [the farm]. She also paid for new equipment and so on. Grandmother was a great business woman. She never slaved in the fields but financed the whole business with her butter and eggs; her own marketing (J.H.p.c.).

J.H. added that "a lot of women financed mechanization back then. All from their butter and cream and so on" (J.H.p.c.). As this example shows, women realized the economic potential of their products and went ahead to invest their earnings directly into the cash-crop component of farm production.

In the course of time, farm women shifted the marketing of dairy products from butter to cream. A number of factors played a role in this development. Government policy was intent on transforming the pattern of small-scale, local marketing of butter to a large-scale, extra-domestic and highly profitable business. Manitoba's Department of Agriculture began to promote the production of butter in creameries rather than on farms. This was done by providing loans and training programs for creamery operators (Ellis, 1971:128). On the level of individual

farmsteads, these government policies meant that the production of cream for market rather than butter was promoted. Creameries purchased cream as a raw material to make butter. To encourage farmsteaders to market their cream to the creameries rather than transforming it into butter for market themselves, pick-up services were initially arranged by creameries to ease the burden of delivering cream. However, few women needed to be convinced to sell cream instead of butter. This is evidenced in Emma Carlson's article:

To work a large churning and make it into prints could be quite a heavy job. So, when another step in progress brought the creamery into the district, no one regretted leaving these chores behind for the convenience of selling cream ... The cream can was a welcome source of cash instead of trade, and greater emphasis was placed on year-round production. Churning on the farm was just for home use or some private customers, but even that dwindled. Creamery butter took over (Erickson, 1984:47-58).

Two incentives to market cream rather than butter come to light in this excerpt. First of all, buttermaking became quite an energy-consuming work process as the amounts of butter made increased. Emma Carlson elaborated in an interview:

The butterprint [one-pound butter mould] made one pound of butter and then you wrapped them [the butter] in wax paper later. Well, if you had, say, ten pounds you stood there pressing [the butter into the one-pound mould in order to make "prints"] and the butter had to be reasonably hard to hold its shape nicely [in order to wrap it properly into wax paper]. You would ache in your back from standing up (p.c.).

Not surprisingly, women gladly surrendered buttermaking in favour of selling cream.

Second, as the cash economy became increasingly pre-eminent, money was becoming the only accepted means through which purchases of capital assets and other needs could be made. Cream generated cash income. I think that because cream production was less labour-intensive than butter production, the time and labour saved could be invested in producing larger quantities of cream for sale. This provided farm women with an opportunity to contribute cash to the farm and farm household on a much larger scale than had previously been possible with butter.

Increased production was facilitated by the introduction of the cream separator around the turn of the century. Previously, one had had to place the milk in shallow pans in the milk house or in special cans with removable bottoms hung down the well. The milk was then left for about two days for the cream to rise so that it could be skimmed off. This method of separating the cream must have limited the amount of cream that could practically be produced on the farm. The local history of Rathwell recorded that the first cream separator in the district, bought by one of Rathwell's farm families in the first decade of this century, cost eighty dollars (1970:103). Clearly, for that price, the purchase of a cream separator had to be worth the investment. The fact that many farmsteads did obtain cream separators suggests that dairying was indeed lucrative. This statement is supported by the fact that by far the majority of my informants noted that they began to sell cream to the creameries as soon as this was possible.

Just how crucial women's cream production was as an income-generating activity was illustrated by informants. During a group interview with five women from the Rathwell area one informant, F.G., recalled:

I remember one year, we lived around Treherne and we sold it [cream] to the creamery. I had a can that was two-thirds full of cream and I hung it down the well. That night we got rain. The next day we were supposed to take it into town. When we went down to the well in the morning the can of cream was full of water. That was the end of the cream and the groceries for that week (F.G.p.c.).

Cream production was an important buffering activity during the Depression as is documented by the considerable increase in cream production in the 1930s (Ellis, 1971:273,512).<sup>\*</sup> Many farm women noted that their families relied on the cream cheque to carry them through hard times. As J.H. asserted, "the cream cheque was crucial back then [1930s]" (p.c.). In a group interview with informants from the prosperous Red River Valley area, I was told that during the 1930s:

People made ends meet by making their own bread and butter and by taking cream to the creameries and eggs to the grocery stores (Winnipeg group interview, p.c.).

Local histories like the one from Rapid City, another prime farming area, make references to the economic importance of cream during this period as well. In a section on the history of Rapid City's creamery it is reported that:

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<sup>\*</sup> Notably, dairy cattle numbers increased at this time while beef cattle numbers declined. The number of creameries in the province increased during this time too. Whereas in 1895, there had only been nineteen creameries in the province, there were more than twice that many following 1917 and more than three times that number following 1928. In 1939 and 1940, there were seventy-two creameries across the province (based on Ellis, 1971:273,512).

It was in the 1930s that the highest production, of over nine hundred thousand pounds, was made ... Cream cheques were of utmost importance in those days (Rapid City, 1978:138).

During economic depressions such as the 1930s, the sale of cream constituted the mainstay on many Manitoba farms. However, in the case of many secondary settlement areas, where conditions of economic marginality were intrinsic rather than limited to periods of overall economic depression, the sale of cream was of ongoing importance to the viability of family farms. This is probably best illustrated by the fact that, in 1916, the provincial government passed the Settlers' Animal Purchase Act, commonly called the "Manitoba Cow Scheme". This legislation provided assistance in establishing dairy herds to struggling settlers "in the Interlake district and other needy areas" (Morton, 1967:354-355 emphasis added). Only married applicants, that is, male household heads (Ellis, 1970:165), were considered under the program -- probably reflecting the important role of women in dairying. It was hoped that, by stimulating dairying in chronically marginal areas, the high incidence of farm failure might be reduced. The government's plans bore fruit. The annual report to the minister of agriculture for 1917 recorded that the production of creamery butter underwent a general increase, most notably in the Interlake (Annual Report, 1917:28). The Dairy Commissioner's annual report of 1918 mentioned a similar annual increase in creamery-butter output and a remarkable increase in the number of creameries in the Interlake from two to eighteen, in two years (Annual Report, 1918:34). The increases in

creamery-butter output in the Interlake indicates that farmsteaders had seized the economic opportunity to increase and stabilize their income by selling more cream. Farm failures in the area did indeed decrease in numbers. It was noted in the 1921 annual report that, "Prior to the passing of the 'Settlers' Animal Purchase Act', many homesteads in the territory between Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba had been abandoned two to three times, and while still there may be occasional instances of this, they are extremely rare in comparison with the abandonments of former years" (Annual Report, 1921:47).

Given the fact that on marginal farms women were often farming on their own, it is evident that creaming for market was their financial contribution to farm and family income. For example, the family history of Nick and Jennie Serwa made numerous references to Jennie's extensive involvement in all aspects of the farm due to Nick's off-farm employment. In this light, the following excerpt describing the economic role of creaming on their farm is significant.

Throughout the years, sometimes as many as forty cows were hand-milked. The cream was kept chilled in summer by putting it into glass gallon jugs, tying a thin rope to the jug, and letting it down into the water of a deep well. Twice a week, the jugs would be emptied into five-gallon cans (sometimes five cans a week) and shipped to the Winnipegosis creamery for two to five dollars a can. This was the only steady income of the farm and the family depended on this money a great deal to buy the bare necessities for the household (Pine River, 1982:190).

In the case of the Zubrak family, the income raised through the sale of butter and later cream was an important economic



activity carried out by Mrs. Zubrak. Cash flow became a problem following the purchase of 240 acres of land and again during the Great Depression which was alleviated by Mrs. Zubrak's dairying activities. Mr. Zubrak related:

My wife had to work hard; [she] milked cows ... Ready cash was hard to get. I remember one year I took a load of grain to the elevator and figured that the seed and threshing cost me 8 cents a bushel, but the grain buyer only paid me 7 cents a bushel. The only salvation was that one could sell cream, and though the creamery did not pay much for a pound of butter fat, yet one received a little cash and was able to buy some groceries (published in: Ewanchuk, 1981:57-58).

My interview notes also contain valuable data on the economic role of dairying in marginal areas and the involvement of women therein. J.H., who farms in a prime area just south of Winnipeg, commented on the regional inequity in Manitoba's agriculture.

It depends also on different areas in the province. Some areas are so much poorer than other areas. The land was worse. They didn't have as good a living. Once you get east from here [in Manitoba's southeastern corner] and a lot of the area in the Interlake, you get into stones. So, you can't grow grain and so that is a poor area. They are going to have cattle and so on ... If they have them to milk, then the women had to work harder because they have to carry the milk and separate the milk. There would be a lot of women depending on that (J.H.p.c.).

Through her active role as a Women's Institute member and organizer, J.H. was, and still is, in frequent contact with women from marginal farms in southeast Manitoba and the Interlake. Her observations for these regions of the province correspond with my own for marginal farms on the southern slopes of the Riding Mountains and the eastern slopes of the Duck Mountains. I spoke to several farm women from these districts

and found that for many of them dairying had either been the mainstay or a major income supplement during many of their years on the farm. For example, O.L. related:

When we got married, when a Ukrainian girl got married, her family, her father, always give her a cow or two. That's how we started. He [father] gave them to me and I was milking them and we had a calf and later on we had more cattle. We sold cream for a living and I used to sell eggs. We had at one time twelve milking cows. I milked cows for thirty-nine years (p.c.).

O.L. supported her family on the money made by producing and selling cream.

All the household was from cream. You didn't get very much for cream at that time. Now you get fifty dollars a can. But before, the most I used to get was twelve dollars a can. But that kept everything going: the cream cheque. I don't think we'd have survived, because we didn't have that much grain or that much of anything [to sell for cash]. The cream kept the flour, sugar, and the curtains and kids' books and clothes, hydro and everything going. Everything was paid out of that. And that was the whole year round. Whatever he [husband] made outside, from cattle or pigs; some of that went to the bank; some of it went for expenses. Whatever he sold, I didn't take anything of that (O.L.p.c.).

Like O.L., M.V.'s dairying, taken over from her deceased mother, was a significant financial contribution towards family well-being and farm continuity.

I used to sell one can, a five gallon cream can a week. It was a hardship for that, because there was no way the cream truck could get into our place. So, I used to haul it to the store two miles. I hitched up a team and then take it. But it was nice [to have the money] coming. Somebody said: "Oh, does she want to be bothered milking cows?" But, that was my income for the week!! ... Yes, I made money by taking cream into town (M.V.p.c.).

After M.V. got married in the late 1940s, she continued to milk cows and sell cream. This was an important source of income since she and her husband had started farming on rented land and other farm income was meagre (M.V.p.c.). After seventeen years of diligent saving, they were able to buy their own farm. M.V. proudly announced, "We didn't borrow, we had saved cash" (p.c.). She also noted that she and her husband bought a new tractor and a new deeptiller in the early 1950s with cash (p.c.). By milking as many as fourteen cows, M.V.'s dairying activities helped finance the farm. This example shows that dairying constituted a vital economic contribution to their farm and was a buffering activity when other sources of income were not adequate to sustain a certain level of family well-being.

In summary, farm women produced a variety of value-added products for sale. Many of these cottage industries were an extension of subsistence work processes. The most lucrative of cottage industries were butter and cream production. Income from the marketing of these products was reliable and helped families bridge difficult times. It was commonly used to purchase family provisions. The need to divert funds from other sources to provide for family needs was therefore reduced or eliminated. In this way, it contributed to farm development. However, many women earned income from the sale of butter and cream which far exceeded family provisioning needs. These women were in a position to invest directly in farm development.

#### 5.4 CONCLUSION

The costs of establishing and developing farms were high, requiring immense cash outlays in procuring capital assets like land, machinery and livestock. At the same time, income from major farm commodities, most notably wheat, were subject to price swings in the international market and therefore uncertain. Women responded by economizing on expenditures and generating income. Economizing activities carried out by women included producing goods and services for family provisioning rather than purchasing them, deferring the purchase of domestic appliances, working in the fields to reduce expenditures on hired help, utilizing country provisions and maintaining subsistence-production work processes. Income-generating activities included paid labour, marketing country provisions and the products of mixed farming and, finally, cottage industries. Income from these sources often formed the financial mainstay of farm families in the first years of settlement and continued to be important in marginal areas where other sources of income were limited. Even where income from these sources was not large, it was reliable, and when grain income was inadequate, women's income-generating activities upheld family standards of living and maintained farm viability through economic downturns. In other words, while a large wheat cheque may have been important to farm expansion, the cream cheque, most notably, was crucial to farm survival. Income from marketing farm products could be quite considerable, especially where marketing centres were

closeby. It was generally used to purchase all family needs. By meeting family needs, income from the field-crop component of the farm did not have to be diverted from farm development. Where women's income far exceeded consumer needs, it could be invested directly in the purchase of farm assets like land and machinery. This was observed, in particular, in the case of selling butter, cream, poultry products, cordwood and seneca roots.

In conclusion, through careful economizing and a variety of income-generating activities, women played a major role in buffering against dropping standards of living and farm failure in poor economic times. In prosperous times, women contributed to farm development both indirectly through financing family provisioning thereby avoiding the diversion of income from grain for this purpose, and directly through investing their earnings into farm assets.

## Chapter VI

### WOMEN IN FARMING TODAY

#### 6.1 FARMING DURING THE POST-WAR BOOM

The post-Depression era harboured fundamental changes in the nature of agriculture. First of all, the new economic stability in prairie agriculture coupled with relatively high returns for farm commodities and favourable weather conditions, encouraged many farm families to specialize in the production of grain or livestock (Ellis, 1971:529). Mixed farming gave way to highly specialized, commercial farming. Many farms ceased to produce for family subsistence as was evidenced by the gradual disappearance of milk cows, pigs and, to a lesser degree, poultry from farmyards.\* Second, processes like farm mechanization and expansion which had been retarded during the 1930s, continued after the Second World War at a rigorous pace. Tractors replaced draft horses, cars and trucks replaced horse-drawn buggies and grain wagons, swathers replaced binders, and combines replaced threshing machines. "In 1971, there was one car per farm, two

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\* The reduction in number of Manitoba farms keeping a variety of livestock is evident from census data. Between 1956 and 1966, an eight percent decrease occurred in the number of farms reporting cattle raising; a twenty-three percent decrease in number of farms reporting having milk cows; a twenty-four percent decrease in number of farms reporting having chickens; a twelve percent decrease in number of farms reporting raising pigs; and a twenty-three percent decrease in number of farms keeping horses (Ellis, 1971:603).

trucks, two tractors, and nearly one combine" (Friesen, 1984:430-1). In addition to these implements, new equipment was introduced that automated such tasks as putting up hay and straw, milking cows, feeding livestock and removing manure. Coupled with genetic engineering and the widespread use of agro-chemicals, mechanization contributed immensely to greater farm productivity.

As farmsteads acquired new machinery and adopted new farming methods, their cost of production increased. Between 1956 and 1976, for example, farm-operating costs rose by a factor of five (Friesen, 1984:432). This acted as an incentive to increase productivity through farm expansion (Giangrande, 1985:92). Between 1941 and 1971, farm size in Manitoba increased from an average of 291 acres per farm to 543 acres (Manitoba Agricultural Yearbook, 1985:98).

Expansion of the land base and the elimination of manual tasks previously performed by hired help through further mechanization increased the work load of individual operators in the field. As a result, men were drawn increasingly into the commodity-production components of their farms. This was facilitated by the nature of the new equipment. Tractors, unlike horses, did not need a rest, permitting operators to work longer hours.

Farm expansion also resulted in fewer families farming. Between 1941 and 1971, the total number of farms in Manitoba dropped from 58,024 to 34,981 (Ellis, 1971:494-495, Manitoba

Agriculture Yearbook 1985:98). Manitoba's rural population declined as a result, a process which, in turn, affected rural community life. Local histories reveal two factors in the decline of rural communities. First of all, local industries such as grist mills, saw mills and creameries were being bought up by centralized corporations and, subsequently, shut down. Branch-railway lines and elevators were closed down in many towns as well. Second, ongoing rural depopulation reduced the client base of local businesses like equipment dealerships and retail outlets and affected the viability of rural services such as post offices, law offices, health-care services and local institutions such as schools, churches and recreation facilities.

Rural-town decline was reinforced by the increasing mobility of rural people. The completion of the provincial highway system in 1950 and the widespread introduction of the car and truck, allowed rural inhabitants to frequent larger service centres. Many informants commented on the changing orientation of farm people from local communities to stores, dealerships and recreational facilities in urban areas with a resulting decline in rural services (S.S., F.W., N.C., N.E.p.c.). But as rural services closed down, more time spent in travelling became unavoidable. Grain had to be hauled over greater distances and machinery parts and groceries could only be acquired in more remote centres where such goods were still available.



#### 6.1.1 Changes in Women's Farm Work

The changes that took place in agriculture and rural life had far-reaching implications for women's work on the farm. First of all, with the increasing involvement of males in commercial production, women began to absorb the tasks of taking meals, vehicles and workers to the field.\* This was facilitated by the advent of the automobile which turned women into the designated 'go-fors' on the farm. Moreover, women began to assume responsibility for farm errands like going for parts and repairs on farm machinery and trucking grain to the bin and elevator. With the closure of services in local communities, these errands became increasingly time-consuming. Second, as farming turned into a business, involving complex management decision-making, women gradually took on administrative responsibilities such as answering business phonecalls and relaying messages, preparing income-tax statements, gathering and filing information, and keeping farm books, that is, financial and production records. Given their new role as farm 'go-fors', many women also came to assume responsibility for banking and bill paying.

Surveys carried out among farm women in recent years show the extent to which women are involved in transportation services and administrative work on the farm. For example, a study done in 1986 among 120 Manitoban farm women revealed that eighty-eight percent of the respondents went for supplies and parts, seventy-

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\* Nowadays, some farm women use radios to communicate with the workers in the field. This has eased their work in transportation somewhat.

seven percent kept financial records, seventy-five percent kept production records, forty-nine percent prepared budgets and tax returns, ninety-three percent paid farm bills, seventy-nine percent prepared bills and statements, seventy-seven percent collected information used in decision-making, and ninety-nine percent answered telephone calls and relayed messages (Berry, 1986:19) .\*

The new role of women on the farm is illustrated by the work experiences of informants. For example, most noted having taken meals to the fields. S.S. explained that, whereas in the past women only prepared lunch for the field, they now had to take supper to the field as well. The extra tasks of packing and transporting suppers replaced, to some extent, women's work in catering to large threshing crews. E.L. noted, for example, that "it is so much easier to put it on the table than to pack everything" (p.c.). In recent years, some women have relinquished the task of packing supper for the field but they still drive to the fields to pick up the men. This is time-consuming as S.M. noted:

I couldn't put hours on it. Between running around and making meals and chasing the men off the field [to eat], it really varies from day to day. They [the men] are combining with two combines and one is at one end of the field so you have to tell him when the supper is ready. And the other one is at the other end, so you have to go tell that one. I find that a lot of time is wasted, a lot of my time. I find that I am not doing work and yet I am chasing around for them (S.M.p.c.).

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\* National figures coincided with provincial ones (Koski, 1982:33; CRDC, 1979:85) .

S.M. mentioned that she still takes meals out to the field when her husband and his partner are pressed for time during harvest.

Most informants were involved in going for repairs and hauling grain. Many also noted having hauled chemicals and livestock and having moved vehicles on the farm. N.C. mentioned that, "in the springtime, I haul fertilizer and do the running back and forth [from field to house] and and the running for repairs". She added that she participated in hauling grain and hogs (N.C.p.c.).

S.M. described her involvement in similar work:

Do you ever watch baseball? You know, they have a designated hitter. I decided I was the designated 'go-for'. Go for parts and repairs to the combine; sometimes hauling grain (p.c.).

Informants were generally all involved in administrative work. For example, K.N. answered business calls, relayed messages and handled the mail on her farm (p.c.). H.U. did all the banking and bill paying. She became the farm's secretary treasurer after it was incorporated (H.U.p.c.). W.G. also did the banking and bill paying but combined this with bookkeeping on her family's incorporated farm. She noted that she spent one day per week on updating records (W.G.p.c.). Another informant, C.T., described her work as follows:

I look after the cheques, go to the bank, look after the telephone bills and hydro bills and do the shopping. I haul the grain into town with a half-ton truck and when the elevator agent writes out the grain cheque, I take it to the Credit Union and deposit it in [my husband's] bank account. I also do most of the correspondence and phoning, like to banks and the like (C.T.p.c.).

By incorporating transportation- and administration-related tasks into their work schedules, women contributed to the commercial production process on the farm by freeing men from these time-consuming chores. This was particularly evident from R.H.'s account. She noted how, with the accelerated trend towards farm commercialization, "there is more things to know as a farm manager" (p.c.). Farm women, she said,

collect all the literature on chemicals and file it and they clip the newspapers and the articles and so when the guys sit down and read it is really productive reading time ... I do this for my husband, I will circle the paper. Like, the papers are piled up here for three weeks and some day, I'll sit down and I'll circle them all and mark a lot of stuff. Then he reads it ... I circle articles on the economy and chemicals or a new development, or a new piece of equipment or something like that. Lots of gals do that, just to try to make the time [for husbands] as productive as we can because they [husbands] are overloaded all the time, at least my husband is, and I think most of them are (R.H. p.c.).

H.U. also related how she began bookkeeping on her family's large, incorporated farm and described the time- and energy-consuming aspects of this work which, if her husband had assumed the administrative role, would have compromised the commercial production process on the farm.

I kept the books from the beginning. Taking the deposits to the bank that's how it all [bookkeeping] started! I have kept at least half a dozen different bookkeeping systems, to try them out. Nowadays, I keep a "loose ledger", feeding all information into the computer ... I cried a lot when I was learning to use the computer. I didn't have much help really. I drove into Winnipeg. They have an education centre there and I took a day on each of a couple of things. And, when I came home I bugged some of my friends over the phone. But, mostly, I learned out of the manual ... I take a couple of hours a week [to update the books] and, then, longer on the month's end because I do profit and loss; a complete print out (R.H.p.c.).

Women's involvement in administrative tasks and transportation services did not translate into greater involvement in other aspects of commodity production on the farm. With the exception of hauling grain and, sometimes, livestock, women on prosperous farmsteads continued to have low input in field tasks. Automated equipment enabled their husbands to carry out most field work by themselves while better returns on farm commodities after the Depression made hired help financially affordable. Informants identified these factors in their non-involvement in field work. D.D. noted, for example, that "in the spring, the field only needs to be cultivated, harrowed and seeded, and one person can do that" (D.D.p.c.). R.H., H.U. and N.G. noted the presence of hired help in the fields (p.c.). As with the automation of field tasks, the automation of tasks related to commercial livestock raising displaced women from this production sphere on many specialized livestock farms. M.B. noted the use of a new haybaler and a tractor with a front-end loader as a factor in her withdrawal from haying and feeding chores (p.c.). Similarly, B.M. mentioned the mechanization of milking on her family's dairy operation as a factor in her withdrawal from milking (p.c.). All in all, then, in farm-commodity production after the war, women came to provide essential services but tended not to share in direct, hands-on tasks within these work processes. Automation was a major factor in contributing to this division of labour. Perhaps more importantly, changes in the technological system underlying housework continued to draw women away from commodity production into domestic work processes.

### 6.1.2 Changes in Women's Domestic Work

The provisioning of electricity to rural homes in the late 1940s and 1950s\* changed the scope of a number of domestic work processes. The use of electric household appliances eliminated the tedium of many tasks. For example, with the advent of electric cookstoves, the wood-cutting and -hauling tasks disappeared. Automatic food processors, blenders and dough mixers reduced the tasks of cutting, beating and mixing food by hand. However, the cooking tasks remained the same. Therefore, while the assistance of men, children and servants in supplying fuel became obsolete and their participation in processing food was reduced, women's share in the food-preparation work processes did not diminish. In fact, the operation and maintenance of these sophisticated appliances was added to their domestic work load. Similarly, with the mechanization of house cleaning, women generally came to operate new equipment such as electric vacuum cleaners and floor polishers. Children and servants who had once been involved in beating and sweeping rugs and scrubbing floors were freed from these tasks. The expansion of farm homes after the Depression, when higher prosperity levels allowed for bigger homes and more furniture, increased women's work load in house cleaning.

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\* In 1946, the Manitoba Power Commission undertook a program of rural electrification which was completed in 1954 (Morton, 1967:454-5). It is evident from local histories that farm homes did not receive electricity at the same time as homes in rural towns. Many did, however, in the 1960s.

The introduction of running water in the home had a similar impact on the nature of domestic work processes. Although tedious tasks like carrying water to and from the house were eliminated, new ones emerged. For example, indoor plumbing created the tasks of cleaning toilets, bathtubs, sinks, and water taps. Moreover, running water in the home enabled people to adopt higher standards of cleanliness which meant that bathrooms, kitchens and clothing came to be cleaned more frequently than had been done in the past (Cowan,1983:88,99).

The advent of the automobile contributed to changes in women's domestic work as well in that women replaced men as suppliers of household needs (Cowan,1983:83). This work became increasingly demanding as farm families incorporated more and more industrial products in their consumption patterns. Greater cash flow on Manitoba farmsteads meant that farm families began to purchase goods and services in the store which had formerly been produced on the farm, such as meat, eggs, milk, fruit, soap, pharmaceutical needs and clothing. Women came to make regular trips to supermarkets, pharmacists and clothing stores in nearby service centres. Therefore, although the decline in home production of family needs reduced the labour of women in related tasks, it did not yield a net saving of time in family provisioning. Cowan argued:

By mid century the time that housewives had once spent in preserving strawberries and stitching petticoats was being spent in driving to stores, shopping, and waiting in lines ... (1983:85).

The automobile contributed to another development in women's domestic work, that is, the creation of "a host of other transportation services (such as taking children to parties and to doctors) that women of an earlier generation had not provided for their families" (Cowan, 1983:178). This development coincided with a change in social values on child rearing whereby emphasis was placed on the personal development of children through extra-curricular activities (Cowan, 1983:179). Mothers began to transport children to music lessons, ballet, hockey practice, figure skating and so on. In addition, they were expected to participate in children's pursuits through personal guidance. This augmented women's work in child rearing as can be observed from weekly schedules of informants with young children. For example, M.T. drives her son to piano lessons and hockey practice every Monday, spending four hours in the process. On Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, she drives her daughter to figure skating, ballet and gymnastics, taking about an hour-and-a-half each day. In addition to these activities, M.T. spends one hour every evening helping her son with piano practice ((M.T.p.c.). Similarly, informant K.N. spends several hours per week taking her children to skating and piano lessons and gymnastics. In addition, she spends the evenings helping her daughter with piano practice, helping with the children's homework, and reading stories before they go to bed (K.N.p.c.).

As recreational facilities close down in local communities, women find themselves spending more and more time on the road



transporting children to centres where facilities are still available, a situation becoming increasingly common in rural areas. For example, N.E. who, for several years, drove her children to Hamiota for piano lessons, a thirty-two-mile round trip, taking one hour in driving alone, had to take them to another piano teacher in Kenton, an eighty-mile round trip, taking an hour-and-a-half. Moreover, she drove one of her children to Brandon for special voice lessons, a round trip of 150 miles, taking three hours (N.E.p.c.).

Child care has become demanding in yet another way. Mothers are expected by the community to participate in organizations to which their children belong. For example, K.R. related:

I find that the things the children are in, I have to be in too. It's a small community and as a mother you have to show your interest, especially with four kids. You can't just dump them and go your own merry way (K.R. p.c.).

As a result, K.R. teaches Sunday School, coordinates figure skating and is a 4-H leader. Similarly, W.G., who donates labour and food to the local Scout and skating clubs and is the secretary treasurer of the Cub Scouts, commented:

I have had this brought up to me several times. For example, [during fund-raising events] you donate the food and pies and all that. Everybody in the community is expected to do this (W.G.p.c.).

As rural towns go in decline and people leave the area, the struggle to keep recreational facilities open places extra demands on women's time and labour. N.E. noted the burden this can turn into when the population base from which to draw women's volunteer support diminishes.

The rink is a focal point in a lot of communities and they [people in communities] want artificial ice and all these great things. But, the community has to be able to afford it. So, one of the ways that you can afford it, in my community, is you provide lunches every night of the week, seven days a week, from October to April. You are supposed to take your turn and, for the most part, it is women that do this. We want to have a rink so that our children can play hockey and do figure skating, and so we can curl and all that. But it becomes a great burden, a GREAT burden (N.E.p.c.).

In summary, three factors were identified which contributed to change in farm women's domestic work around the middle of this century. First of all, the availability of electricity and running water in the home altered the scope of various domestic work processes. Tedious tasks were eliminated but new, more complex ones added. These are often carried out by women without the assistance of men, children and servants. Three factors reinforced this development. Men were drawn away from domestic production by the expansion of commercial production on the farm. Obligatory school attendance legislated in the first half of this century (Morton,1967:350) pulled children out of domestic tasks. And, finally, rural depopulation eroded the basis from which domestic help could be hired. Surveys have shown the high proportion of housework done by women alone.\*

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\* For example, a national survey done in 1982 found that nearly eighty-six percent of household tasks was done by women with husbands contributing only seven percent and other household members making up the difference (Koski,1982:31). The CRDC study found that thirty-three percent of husbands did not do any domestic work at all and that those who did so were most likely to assist with financial management of the home and child care (CRDC,1979:9,78). Husbands were least likely to assist with the clothing, food-related, care-of-the-sick, and house-cleaning work processes (ibid). A Manitoba study done among women in 1986 found that its respondents performed seventy-nine percent of the domestic work (Berry,1986:8). Husbands did less than ten percent

Second, with the incorporation of processed foods, manufactured clothing and pharmaceutical goods into family-consumption patterns, women came to make regular trips to service centres. This development was facilitated by the advent of the automobile. Women consequently became household suppliers.

Third, despite the fact that families were getting smaller, child rearing became more demanding as society began to place more emphasis on children's personal development. While children were, at one time, 'producers' in the farm household, helping their mothers with gardening, cooking, cleaning and babysitting, increasingly, they became 'consumers' of goods and services produced by their mothers.

In conclusion, despite the mechanization of housekeeping and the availability of processed foods, manufactured clothes and professional health care, women's work load in the domestic sphere was not reduced. This conclusion finds support in national and provincial surveys. For example, Ruth Berry's study among Manitoba farm women found that respondents spent fifty-four hours per week in family and household work (Berry, 1986:7). This figure coincides with findings by the CCRD study (1979:7) which concluded on the basis of its research that with the

proliferation of time-saving appliances to ease the household work-load, one would think that the 52 hours spent by the average farmwife in 1924 (U.S.A.) would be greatly reduced, yet research studies show that almost no change had occurred in the last 50 years.

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while other household members did seventeen percent (ibid). These provincial figures, like the national ones, support the argument that women are the main workers in the domestic sphere on the farm.

The CRDC study also reported a significant difference found in the weekly number of hours spent in housework by women with and women without children, that is, nearly fifty-nine hours compared to just over forty hours respectively (CRDC, 1979:74). This indicates the labour-intensive nature of child rearing.

#### 6.1.3 Economizing and Income Generation

With women becoming increasingly responsible for child rearing and household work, they adjusted their economizing activities to accommodate their busy schedules. Subsistence production on the farm decreased. For example, N.J. commented that she cut back on gardening "to spend as much time as possible with the children" (N.J.p.c.). Another informant, W.G., related:

We spend about thirteen hundred dollars per year on milk because we are with the six of us. That would very nicely pay for a cow, but who is going to milk it? That is the problem. I already do everything else around here. There are times that you have to draw a line as to what you are going to do (W.G.p.c.).

In addition to women's busy schedules, other factors played a role in the decline of home provisioning on the farm. These were higher levels of farm prosperity allowing for the purchase of consumer goods; year-round availability of fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and eggs at relatively low prices; greater accessibility to stores resulting from all-season roads and rapid transportation; and the appeal of advertising, especially to rural youths. Several informants noted the effect of these factors on their home provisioning activities. C.T. commented, for example:

I used to do a lot of sewing for the kids, until the youngest was about eight. Then I quit because now kids want designer jeans and camouflage vests (p.c.).

Another informant, R.H., said:

We have a grain farm and a feedlot. When we ship beef, I don't even keep a half! I buy it off the meat counter because it is cheaper and we can buy the cuts that we want ... We used to raise a steer for beef. Now I just go to the store, the same as the gal in the city (R.H.p.c.).

Similarly, W.G. mentioned the availability of relatively cheap poultry products in the store as a reason for not raising chickens. She said, "I don't have chickens because the time and work involved in keeping chickens simply does not pay for itself"

(W.G.p.c.). Other informants told me:

There was more money around [and] farm families started buying more in stores (Winnipeg group interview, p.c.).

In the late 1970s, everybody started to buy cottage cheese, cheese and eggs. Farmers milk less now; some even quit completely. They couldn't be bothered anymore. Milk and cheese are available through the store. So, they started to do less [home production] because it is too much work to milk and make cottage cheese and butter and so on (D.T.p.c.).

Farm women did not substitute industrial products for home-made ones at the same rate and to the same extent. For example, although many informants had completely relinquished the production of beef, pork, poultry and dairy products for family consumption, nearly all had continued to keep gardens, preserve vegetables and fruit and bake bread and pastries. However, the extent to which they carried out these activities varied from providing almost all family needs to merely a fraction. Many supplemented home-produced pastries, garden produce and preserves

with store-bought goods. Similarly, with respect to clothing, most informants combined home manufacture of clothes with purchasing.\*

Home production as an income-generating activity of farm women appears to have decreased in the decades after the War as well. Some of the factors responsible for this development may be the proliferation of factory-made products which replaced traditional, home-made ones; greater farm prosperity which reduced the need for extra farm income; and shrinking local markets related to the ongoing processes of rural depopulation and rural-town decline. An additional factor may be industry and government regulations on sanitation and productivity. Uninspected meat, eggs and dairy products could no longer be sold through retail stores. Several informants commented on the

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\* A survey carried out in 1986 among 120 Manitoba farm women shows the extent to which these women have relinquished the home production of vegetables and preserves. Eighty-three percent of the respondents kept vegetable gardens on a regular basis; fifteen percent on an occasional basis; and two percent kept no garden at all (Berry, 1986:17). Eighty-eight percent of the respondents preserved food for family consumption on a regular basis; eleven percent did so occasionally; and one percent did not do so at all (ibid). These statistics reflect my own observations for Manitoba farm women. My observations with respect to the production of livestock products for family provisioning find support in the national survey among farm women carried out in 1982 by Susan Koski: only thirty-two percent of the respondents cared for animals used for family consumption on a regular basis; thirty-four percent did so occasionally; and thirty-four percent did not do so at all (Koski, 1982:32). With respect to clothes-making, the CRDC study of 1979, found that only about sixty percent of its 908 respondents manufactured family clothing (CRDC, 1979:87). Although this figure implies that this activity continues to be carried out on a sizeable scale, it also shows that many women have relinquished it. The study also found that sixty-six percent of its Manitoba respondents reported doing less work in home production than before (1979:88).

impact of some of these factors on the production of goods on the farm for sale. R.N. noted, for example, that "times got better and many farmers quit milking because they didn't need that money anymore" (R.N.p.c.).

Other income-generating activities, like off-farm employment, were engaged in on a limited scale. A number of farm women contributed to the expansion and mechanization of their farms in this way after the War. For example, N.T., who worked in a printing office and drove a school bus for several years after her marriage in the early 1960s, explained how she allocated her income from these jobs.

I didn't save it, although I have my own bank account. But, that's the way we [my husband and I] did it. Anything we earned, it all pretty well went into the farm; into building up the farm so that we didn't have to borrow any money (N.T.p.c.).

Similarly, N.G. explained how she contributed financially to the development of the farm through income earned as a nurse. Starting with 160 acres of land and only some basic equipment, N.G.'s income from nursing enabled them to gradually expand and mechanize.

The money I earned we lived on. The money or whatever my husband made went back into the farm, because that is what we wanted to do; trying to make a good farm. We expanded the farm as we went along and when we could afford it (N.G.p.c.).

These examples illustrate that women who worked off the farm contributed to the development of the farm in both direct ways, through investment in farm assets, and indirect ways by contributing financially to the household budget.

In summary, in the decades after the War, agriculture underwent a general upswing and prosperity levels increased. Farm women relaxed their economizing and income-generating activities. They reinvested their time in raising their families' standards of living by maintaining larger households and engaging in more intensive child rearing.

## 6.2 EFFECTS OF THE FARM CRISIS

The overall upswing in agriculture after the Second World War came to an abrupt end in the late 1970's. By the early 1980s, interest rates and the cost of production had climbed to record highs and, since then, farm-commodity prices have dropped to record lows. A great many Canadian farm families are in financial distress, suffering from severe cash-flow problems. Farm incomes have dropped since the beginning of the crisis and farm families will face further declines in real, net farm income. Provincial agriculture statistician Errol Lewis has predicted that the average Manitoba farm operator will only make \$14,589 this year, which is down nineteen percent from 1987 (Brandon Sun, 16/1/1988).

The Farm Credit Corporation announced that, by the end of 1987, eight percent of Canada's farm operators were insolvent and another twenty-three percent had cash-flow problems that could lead to insolvency. In other words, almost one-third of Canadian farm operators were on the verge of going broke (Brandon Sun, 6/1/1988). Many already have. Between 1979 and 1987, a total of



3356 farm families went bankrupt in Canada, of which 349 in Manitoba (Manitoba Agriculture: Farm Bankruptcies, 2/2/1987). These figures tell only part of the story. They do not include farm families who leave the farm through selling out quietly or through foreclosure. The 1986 Census of Agriculture showed that 2106 Manitoban families had left the farm between 1981 and 1986 alone, a 7.2 percent decline, leaving merely 27,336 families on the farm in 1986 (Manitoba Agriculture: 1986 Census Results, 30/5/1987). As farm families leave the land, farm-service industries close down as well, adding to the problem of rural-town decline.

#### 6.2.1 Increased Participation In Commodity Production

During the last decade, dwindling farm incomes have caused women to increase their participation in commodity production on the farm, that is, in field work and in chores related to commercial livestock keeping. First of all, low farm incomes have meant that many husbands have sought off-farm employment to supplement farm income (Brandon Sun, 19/9/87). Second, hired help has become less affordable. As a result, women have taken up the slack in farm chores. One informant, a farm woman from south-central Manitoba, related in this respect that:

In our area there are a lot of specialized [grain] farms that were well off. Therefore, the women didn't go out and do things [in the field]. NOW, it seems they do more [field work] than when I was young, because now, if they [husbands] have combines and trucks, which are all easy to run, the women drive the truck or do whatever. Then they [husbands] don't need to hire a man at all. That just wipes out paying wages. Therefore, the women are working harder, or, at

least, they are taking more of an active role (M.W.p.c.).

In other words, as in previous depressions, women's participation in farm-commodity production economizes on labour expenses when farm income is low. This is also evident from headlines in local newspapers in the last few years. For example, in an article entitled "Farm Women Working Harder", the Winnipeg Free Press (17/12/1984) reported that women's participation in field work and livestock raising is

critical today, with growing numbers of farms in Canada in danger of failing because of high interest rates and low prices for farm produce ... The Federal Farm Credit Corporation estimates that ... as many as 17 percent of its clients are under financial pressure ... That pressure has forced many farm women to roll up their sleeves even higher in order to hold onto the homestead ... Audrey Turbett, whose family runs a dairy farm just outside Winnipeg says a number of livestock farms in the area have had to lay off hired hands to save money ... "A lot of women are helping out more in the barn", says Turbett, who adds she still heaves her share of hay bales as well as doing the bookkeeping.

Apart from the fact that hired help has become less affordable, the accelerating trend towards rural depopulation has meant that hired help, especially skilled help, has also become less available. As a result, women are training themselves to become experienced equipment operators and, in this way, buffer against labour shortages. Many have taken advantage of the courses on farm mechanics and safety offered by Assiniboine Community College for women across the province.\* The nation-wide CRDC study reported that its respondents noted "the high wages

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\* "Farmer's Wives Tame Mechanical Monsters", Winnipeg Free Press (27/12/1986); "Safety Big Factor In Popular Course For Farm Women", Brandon Sun (21/3/1987).

and low availability of hired help" as the major incentives for their increased participation in commodity production (CRDC,1979:15). Although respondents also identified a number of other factors such as smaller families and domestic appliances (CRDC,1979:15), this thesis has shown that these did not provide women with more time for participation in commodity production. In fact, most farm women carry a double work load. They work in commodity production while remaining responsible for nearly all domestic work. A national study found that women who are on the farm full-time do eighty-seven percent of the housework and eighteen percent of the farm work (Koski,1982:31).

The following case studies exemplify the economizing and, often, buffering role of women's participation in commodity production. They also illustrate the contemporary sexual division of labour in field and barn work processes.

W.G. farms with her husband and parents-in-law in western Manitoba. They operate a large farm of several sections. Half their income comes from cattle while the other half is from grain production. Although W.G. and her husband own a few sections of land together, most of the farm is co-owned by her parents-in-law. At present, W.G. and her husband are in the process of taking over the entire farm. They owe her husband's parents well over half a million dollars (W.G.p.c.).

Although the G.'s can be considered prosperous and well-established farmers, they experience financial worries. W.G.

related that, as a result of the current crisis in Canadian agriculture, their net farm income has dropped while input costs have risen. This has placed them in a precarious situation. W.G. stated that their financial position at the bank has not improved in the last five years and that their operating loans have grown (p.c.).

The farm employs three full-time workers, one of whom works year-round and the others on a seasonal basis. Despite the hired help, however, W.G. invests many hours of labour in the farm. "I fill in wherever it is needed" (W.G.p.c.). She participates in checking on bred cows during the calving season in the spring. During the growing season, her main job is baling hay and straw for the cattle while the men work in the grain fields. At the time of our interview, she had just finished putting up twenty thousand bales of straw and, while she had had some assistance from the men in haying, she had raked all of the second-cut hay by herself. W.G. also combines occasionally in the harvest season and is heavily involved in grain hauling. She related that, in addition,

I test the grain [for dryness] and I call at the elevator. I call the elevator all the time to find out the prices and to ask if we can deliver the wheat (p.c.).

Because her husband spends a lot of time away from the farm on business, W.G.'s involvement in commodity production includes giving orders to the hired men and dealing with suppliers and dealers. In addition, she keeps the books and does all the banking (p.c.).

W.G. estimates that she does twenty-five percent of the farm work, that is, field and barn work; one hundred percent of the bookkeeping; ninety-five percent of all household work and, increasingly, most of the farm errands and child care. She has four school-age children. W.G.'s husband contributes little to domestic work. He cooks occasionally but, as a rule, never launders, cleans or bakes (W.G.p.c.).

W.G.'s heavy involvement in the farm is of vital importance. Considering the size of the enterprise and its multi-faceted production structure, W.G. and her husband increasingly need each other's help in managing the farm and sharing the work load. In addition, the current crisis in agriculture, which has caused a drop in their income at a time when W.G. and her husband are paying off heavy debts, has given strong impetus to W.G.'s growing farm involvement.

About one hundred kilometers to the south of the G. farm, the I. family lives and works. F.I. and her husband, C.I., operate a grain farm of just over one thousand acres in size. The farm is in serious financial trouble. The situation of F.I. and her family is characteristic for many of Manitoba's financially troubled farm families. They expanded their operation at a time when rising interest rates and falling grain prices were just around the corner. As a result of their worsening financial situation, F.I. and her husband have had to find off-farm employment to subsidize the farm operation. F.I. also does a lot of the field work. Her husband's mother, N.I., pitches in with

the field work as well. N.I., a widow in her late sixties, operates her own grain farm. She told me that she does most of the spring work and all of the summer work on her son and daughter-in-law's farm:

Our land joins each other so we work the land together. The economics makes it viable that way. If we didn't work together, we would have to have two different sets of machinery, plus my son could not work off the farm because he wouldn't have anybody to work the land when he is away. So, we work the machinery together and I do most of the land work on his farm, as well as my own (N.I.p.c.).

The field work is generally based on a sexual division of labour whereby son, C.I. seeds the fields and applies chemicals in the spring and the women pick stones and cultivate the land. In the fall, son C.I. generally hauls grain and fixes equipment while the women swath and combine. After the harvest, mother N.I. usually cultivates the land (p.c.).

The example of the I. family is significant in that it shows the economizing nature of women's field work. Under conditions of financial stress and male off-farm employment, this labour contribution takes on a buffering quality.

The next example illustrates women's work on a dairy farm. N.O. has always worked in her family's large dairy operation. The O. family has 190 head of cattle of which seventy are being milked at present. They produce around 1250 to 1300 liters of milk per day and employ three hired men year-round of whom one is full-time. Most work processes on the farm, such as milking, barn and equipment cleaning, grain growing, haying and feed

mixing are automatized. Despite the fact that a monthly milk cheque maintains a steady cash flow on the farm, the O. family is not financially secure. Their net farm income amounts to little more than three thousand dollars per year on average, after all expenses like household needs, interest payments on bank loans, farm chemicals, feed and wages, have been paid (M.O.p.c.).

According to daughter M.O., the farm is presently operating above its labour capacity. This situation is characteristic of many farms that struggle with heavy debt loads and high interest payments and which attempt to gain extra income by intensifying production through expansion. The O. farm is milking more cows than it used to in the past. This has also created extra work for everyone involved in haymaking. However, the farm can not afford to hire extra help and family labour is intensive (M.O.p.c.).

N.O. and daughter M.O. participate in many aspects of the farm. Both are heavily involved in haying. Daughter M.O. related that she is "the farm's main baler" (M.O.p.c.). They participate in the feeding chores which are carried out several times a day. Although mixing feed is mechanized, getting the feed to the cattle is not and mother and daughter are involved in carrying the pails of feed and bales of hay to the cows in the barn. N.O. is also involved in feeding calves after milking. Calves are fed by bottle which is quite labour-intensive (M.O.p.c.).

N.O. has always participated in milking which involves getting the cows inside from an outside shed, placing the milking equipment on each cow for five to ten minutes, and disinfecting the udders. N.O. has also always been responsible for cleaning and sanitizing the milking equipment and milk tank. Cleaning the milking equipment consists of an internal and an external cleaning. The internal cleaning takes about forty-five minutes to one hour and is done twice a day, after each milking shift. Daughter M.O. explained that cleaning involves "running hot water, at the right temperature for a proper cleaning, through the system". This is followed by "running certain chemicals through the system", after which "water is run through the system once again" and is then "drained in separate sinks" (M.O.p.c.). The internal cleaning is fully automized and N.O. basically operates the taps which need to be turned on and off at the right time. The external cleaning takes about forty-five minutes but, according to daughter M.O., if one had the time to do it "properly", following the "rules", it would take up to two hours (M.O.p.c.). It is carried out once a day, usually in the morning after milking by N.O. At that time she does the internal and external cleaning simultaneously taking an hour-and-a-half. In addition, she cleans the milk tank every second day when emptied by the milk haulers. In the past, this was done manually which took twenty to sixty minutes, depending on how thoroughly she cleaned the tank. Nowadays, this process is automized, too, and does not take more than ten to fifteen minutes. Besides working with the dairy cattle in the barn and haying in the fields, the



two women, N.O. and M.O., keep the farm books which, in the past, was done by N.O. alone. Mother N.O. is also responsible for all bill paying. Although N.O. and M.O. get a wage for their work on the farm, I was told that when all hours of labour are considered, the wage amounts to little more than one dollar per hour (M.O.p.c.). This is indicative of the buffering nature of their participation in commodity production.

The following example involves the work of informant, C.H. on a hog farm near Beausejour. She and her husband raised six hundred hogs per year and C.H. has always been heavily involved in all aspects of the operation including looking after the fifty breeding sows when they were to have offspring, castrating the male piglets and feeding and vaccinating all hogs on the farm. C.H. related that her involvement in the hog operation was necessitated by the lack of funds to hire help (p.c.).

C.H.'s involvement is similar to that of T.M. who, together with her husband, operates a mixed farm west of the Duck Mountains. They raise seven hundred hogs a year and have a beef cattle herd of approximately ninety head. The farm cannot afford to hire help. As a result, besides working full-time off the farm as a bank clerk to support the financially troubled family farm, T.M. works extensively with the livestock. She assists cows that are calving, helps sows delivering their offspring, does all the vaccinating of the farm's livestock plus treats the animals against worms, cuts the hogs' tails, castrates male piglets, and helps with dehorning the cattle. T.M. related that

she does "all the doctoring" on the farm. In addition to this responsibility, she participates in loading animals on the truck for transportation off the farm (T.M.p.c.).

B.L. of Neepawa shares many of T.M.'s experiences in operating her family's cow/calf and feedlot operation. She assists her husband in dehorning and loading cattle. Her role in this first job consists largely of chasing the animals into a chute. The farm has one hundred head of cattle and B.L. is generally also responsible for vaccinating them and administering worm treatments. B.L. related that the farm does not employ any hired help and that she fills in where and whenever needed (p.c.).

Farm woman N.T. also participates in the family's farm, a sheep/grain operation. At one time, the farm also raised cattle and hogs. N.T. related that she has always done a lot of the work with the livestock which was necessary, in part, because her husband was employed off the farm and, in part, because the farm can not afford hired help (p.c.). She said:

I do most of the farm work. You can't both be away, especially with lambing. I look after the sheep, especially during lambing time. But, also, I do the chores, like feed whatever animals we have and water them (N.T.p.c.).

N.T. elaborated on her involvement in the farm's main sphere of production, that is, sheep raising:

In the winter [it takes] maybe half an hour a day for feeding and watering. In lambing time; that goes on for about two months; that's quite a bit more time because you're out! At least every couple of hours you go out and check [the pregnant ewes]. If one [lamb] is born then there is things to do. You eartag them and put them in the pen and do this and that. It takes quite a bit of time (N.T.p.c.).

N.T. doctors the sheep that have trouble lambing as well. She also mows hay and does all the baling on the farm. Her involvement in crop growing centers around hauling and augering grain. N.T. also does many of the farm errands, such as going for repairs. Although her husband keeps the farm books and does his own banking, N.T. does the income tax (N.T.p.c.).

The last example involves farm woman D.N. who operates a poultry farm in south-central Manitoba. She began her poultry operation in the late 1960s when prices for grain were depressed and her husband's grain farm was in serious trouble. In an effort to raise extra income, D.N. traded some of her husband's oats with another farmer for one thousand chicks. Within a few months, she repeated the trade three times and started off her first year as a poultry farmer with four thousand chicks. D.N. manages and operates the poultry farm by herself and receives help from her husband and children with particularly labour-intensive work processes such as preparing birds for market. D.N. related that she earns a steady income from her poultry operation, which helps to diversify her family's income. She also works on her husband's farm in combining, grain hauling, and deeptilling (p.c.).

In summary, the examples presented have illustrated women's increased participation in commodity-production work processes on a variety of farms. In many cases, lack of income to hire help and the employment of husbands off the farm have been major factors in drawing women back into field work and livestock

raising. They perform such field tasks as combining, swathing and cultivating. On livestock farms, they participate in doctoring and feeding animals and, on dairy farms, in milking cows and bottle-feeding calves. At the same time, women's participation in transportation services and administrative work has remained high.

Although task sharing between husbands and wives has increased in commodity production, the domestic realm of production on the farm remains primarily a female responsibility. Research has suggested that a higher level of husband-help exists in such domestic activities as cooking and child care but task sharing in other aspects of housework is minimal. Undoubtedly, women's input in commodity production, whether directly as field hands or indirectly as 'go-fors' and homemakers, contributes to the farm operation and buffers it against failure at a time when farm income is low.

#### 6.2.2 Repercussions For Farm Women's Household Economizing

Many farm families, particularly those who are hardest hit by the crisis, have had to tighten their belts in the last several years. Since women have traditionally played a major role in "controlling family expenditures and family consumption wants" (Kohl, 1976:71), they are often the first ones to take economizing measures in the farm household. For example, informant M.B. described her late mother-in-law's financial management of the home.

Like, my mother-in-law worked really hard and knew the ins and outs of the farm. When she was gone [passed away in the mid 1980s] my father-in-law couldn't even turn around; he didn't realize so many things; like how much it costs for hydro and telephone and how well she budgeted on buying food and clothes and how much these things cost. [Men often don't realize] just how good a job these women are doing, just keeping the family going on so little; and actually realizing how little of their money goes into the household as opposed to the farm (M.B.p.c.).

M.B. also related how severe cash-flow problems on her and her husband's farm affected her own financial management of the household:

Even down to buying groceries. Things have been skimpy around here ... You have to count your pennies every day. But its really your lifestyle that is affected the most. You go shopping and you know you only have ten dollars to spend and you buy what you need most ... There is never anything left over for anything extra, like to ever take a holiday or even buy a new pair of jeans. Sometimes [my husband] will say, when we are going somewhere, "Why don't you have something to wear", and I'll say "Well there isn't the money; I needed milk or something else worse" (p.c.).

Similarly, E.L., whose family was about to lose the farm through foreclosure at the time of the interview, related how she economizes on family expenses for food. She grows a large garden and bakes bread and sweets for her family of nine.

Despite our financial trouble, we have always eaten well as far as wholesome food goes. I don't buy tinned, prepared things [processed food]. We fix it from scratch. For instance, I don't buy cookies as a rule. Once in a while, I may do that but NEVER frozen pies or cakes or anything like that. Like, if I don't bake it we simply don't have it. It's not a necessity anyhow to have baked goods, although it is nice (E.L.p.c.).

E.L. also explained how economizing on housing expenditures saved income for investment in the farm operation.

When we moved into this house we had the intention of building on and fixing it up and insulating it and all this. And now, ... all the money was always put in the farm, nothing went into the house (E.L.p.c.)

Despite obvious attempts to economize on family expenses, financially strapped farm women today seem to have more difficulty making ends meet than in previous depressions.\* Relative prosperity in recent decades has allowed many to relinquish family-provisioning activities in favour of the purchase of consumer goods. The loss of self-provisioning pursuits has meant that, now, some farm families can not provide basic food needs. Key informant K.I. told me that,

Many farmers don't grow their own gardens anymore. They are not feeding themselves anymore. So, we have farmers in Canada who, once they run out of cash flow, can not afford to put food on their family's table when [they] are sitting on two or three sections of land.

The inability to make ends meet in the home was evident in a 1985 newspaper article commenting on farm financial problems in Saskatchewan which had been exacerbated by drought. Paraphrasing farm activist Jean Argue, the author of the article wrote:

She believes hundreds of farm families are on the brink of poverty ... Argue said she was shocked to find families going without proper food and clothing ... She also found a generation of farm families who are as dependent on the grocery store and packaged foods as their city counterparts. They don't raise chickens, they don't bake bread, and the grasshoppers ate their gardens ... But while they may try to hide it, a farm family's hard times are broadcast by their lack of

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\* The lengths to which some families must go to economize on farm and family expenses is not shared by all farm families. Many farm families still have adequate income to meet production costs and family expenses. Among other advantages, they are likely to have expanded their farm operations at opportune times, that is, before the downturn in commodity prices and higher costs of production impaired their ability to reduce their burden of loans.

spending (Winnipeg Free Press, 31/8/1985).

Other developments besides consumerism have affected the ability of farm families to cope successfully with the current crisis situation. First of all, I suspect that the process of commercialization of rural life, whereby reciprocity gave way to buying and selling of services, has gradually eroded the basis of neighbourliness upon which farm families at one time drew mutual economic support. Many of the traditional forms of cooperation like work bees and rings have been replaced by contract work. Second, the incorporation of the cash economy in rural life has meant that farm women can no longer barter their home-made products for commercial ones at the local store. Both developments have reduced a farm family's ability to conserve income at a time when economizing is essential to financial survival. Therefore as farm women's former in-kind contributions to family consumption needs have diminished, many now supplement these with cash contributions to the household budget. Forthcoming case studies illustrate how farm women today pay for family needs with cash earned through off-farm employment and farm-based activities like cottage industries.

#### 6.2.3 Women's Off-Farm Employment

Farm women have responded in more than one way to the deepening crisis in agriculture. Apart from economizing on labour costs by increasing their direct participation in farm work, many women have undertaken a variety of income-generating

strategies. Seeking off-farm employment is one widely recognized strategy. At the 1987 Manitoba Farm Women's Conference, farm woman Nancy Painter noted in her closing address that

more farm women are pitching in with field work and taking jobs to subsidize the family farm ... The regular paycheque an off-farm job yields will generate cash flow ... (Brandon Sun, 20/11/87).

Newspaper columnist Penny Ham commented on the diversity of jobs held by a large proportion of the five hundred farm women who attended the conference. She wrote:

And what a variety of women reside on Manitoba farms! - writers, magazine editors, lawyers, home economists, directors of development corporations, artists, teachers, nurses and even some bankers (Brandon Sun, 9/12/87).

Based on my own research, this list can be extended to include travel agents, bank and store clerks, store owners and managers, waitresses, kitchen aids, cooks, gas-station attendants, librarians, office workers, bus drivers, driving instructors, caretakers and paid workers on neighbouring farms.

It is evident from comments made by older informants that the widespread adoption of off-farm employment by farm women is a relatively recent development. H.U., who farms south of Winnipeg, told me, for example:

When I got married in 1949 it was an unheard thing that you worked after you were married. It just didn't enter into your mind that if you were a farm wife, that you would commute to Winnipeg and work. Yet, when my son and daughter-in-law were married in 1976, [my daughter-in-law] just automatically continued to work ... It was just an accepted thing.



Likewise, farm women D.D. of western Manitoba and J.H. of south-central Manitoba, remarked that farm women's off-farm work was subject to criticism in the late 1940s and 1950s (p.c.). Nowadays, D.D. said, many farm women can have their own careers. D.D. related that this is reflected in the need to switch local Women's Institute meetings from afternoons to evenings to accommodate farm women who have off-farm jobs (D.D.p.c.). In the 1940s, 50s and 60s, farms were able to generate enough income to support the family and farm operation without outside incomes. Nowadays, such income is vital to keeping farm and family going. As a result, many farm women now seek employment off the farm. Retired farm woman, N.E., articulated this:

When I was on the farm [1950s and 1960s] most women all around me were also [working exclusively] on farms. That was our jobs ... But now, what has changed is that many of the women have jobs in town. They are coming to nurse, they are coming to teach, they are working as nurses' aids and in restaurants. They do that because they need the money. The farm has to have the money to keep the thing going. The farm is not the viable operation anymore. That is how I read it. The money from the outside source -- the money from the woman's job -- keeps the family going. If she weren't bringing that income in, I don't know what would be happening to many of the farms now (N.E.p.c.).

In the last decade, farm women who have an off-farm job have become more the rule and less the exception. Almost every informant could name several neighbouring farms on which women had off-farm jobs. M.B., who farms with her husband on the southern slopes of the Riding Mountains, related, for example:

Well, here in the community there's just about fifty percent of the farm households, maybe, that have women working off the farm for the household. That is why my mom went to work. There was never any curtains around in this house or never anything extra until she did go to work (M.B.p.c.).

S.S., who works off the farm as an assistant in the kitchen of the hospital in a nearby town, commented:

There are a lot of women with off-farm jobs [in this area, around Rathwell, St. Claude and Treherne]. In fact, there are a lot of them working where I am working. Off-farm jobs keep the family and house going. It pays for food and clothing for the kids (S.S.p.c.).

J.R. responded to the question as to whether she knew farm women in her area (near Minnedosa and Neepawa) working off the farm, with:

Oh yes. You wouldn't believe! There are women who are working now that I never dreamed would leave the farm. That is economics, you see. They ... are going to work because they have to. I know of a big time operator around here whose wife drives a school bus because she is short of cash. Just because you are big, that doesn't say that you have got any cash flow (J.R.p.c.).

Likewise, N.C. of the same area, answered:

I did a little survey within the radius of four square sections around our farm and found out that over half of the farm women have off-farm jobs. In most of the cases, the job is to support the farm or provide the food, music lessons, hockey gear, clothes and so on for the family. For most of them, that money was not just being used for frills but was needed cash! (N.C.p.c.).

The comments made by informants illustrate the growing trend towards farm women taking off-farm employment. They also reflect the buffering role played by women's off-farm income under depressed economic circumstances. Several statistical studies confirm this analysis: Berry (1986), a Manitoba source; Ireland (1983) and McGhee (1985), two Ontario sources; and two national surveys, one carried out by the National Farmers' Union (Koski, 1982) and the other by the CRDC (1979). They established

that roughly one-third of farm women have off-farm jobs of whom about thirty percent work full-time. The studies also revealed that many farm women with off-farm jobs (ninety-six percent according to Ireland, 1983:47) allocate part or all of their income to living expenses and farm expenses. For example, the NFU study showed that forty-three percent of women with off-farm jobs invested fifty percent or more of their off-farm income in the farm (ibid:25). In general, women's off-farm incomes contributed thirty-four percent of the total family income (ibid:24). In analyzing census data, sociologist Pamela Smith found that between 1971 and 1981 a notable increase had taken place in women's off-farm employment in Canada. She also found that an increase had occurred in the number of weeks per year worked off the farm by farm women (Smith, 1987:159-160).

The national study carried out by the NFU showed that women employed full-time off the farm still performed seventy-nine percent of the household tasks and eight percent of the farm tasks, while those employed part-time off the farm did eighty-four percent of the household work and almost fifteen percent of the farm work (Koski, 1982:31). The studies all agree that:

It is a well-known fact in our society that the traditional division of labour makes women almost totally responsible for household tasks and childcare. Therefore, with each additional job she takes on, she adds to the absolute number of hours she works and diminishes the amount of "free time" at her disposal. In the majority of cases where women work in a family enterprise or in the labour force, her total workload is at least double the popular standard of 40 hours per week (CRDC, 1979:18).

In other words, women with off-farm jobs generally carry triple work loads.

While sources of statistical information help us develop a view of farm women's off-farm employment in an aggregate sense, it is more difficult to develop a conception of what women's off-farm employment means in daily life. Interviews with farm women who hold off-farm jobs provide concrete examples of why such jobs are taken, how they are managed alongside other work and how income from these jobs is allocated.

Severe cash-flow problems on E.L.'s farm have made it necessary for E.L. to work off the farm. She had been substitute teaching for several years prior to our interview in 1985. She said it was hard to combine working off the farm while raising several small children but she, nevertheless, "put in a request for substituting in all school divisions as far as [an hour's drive away]" (p.c.). Since no teaching positions were available in the summer and fall of 1985, E.L. took a job as a waitress. She related:

I was substitute teaching but there wasn't that much work that way. So, [when] there were positions at [a local hotel-restaurant] I was hired on to help with the banquets. So, this is what I was doing for a while. And, then, this summer I worked as a counter girl for a while [as well] when they [at the same work place] had the barn dances. This was evening work, from eight [p.m.] until one o'clock [a.m.] and you get to stay and clean things up, so I didn't get home until four or five in the morning. That was difficult! I was too tired. I was really tired (E.L.p.c.).

When I spoke to E.L. again, in the summer of 1987, she told me that, in 1986, she had worked as a library assistant in a nearby

school and, in 1987, was lucky to find employment as a substitute teacher again. E.L.'s income from her off-farm jobs was crucial in providing her family with essentials.

Another informant, farm woman and registered nurse S.M. related how her off-farm income was allocated:

We bought the farm in 1977. When we moved onto the farm I went to school and took my nursing diploma, because I knew I had to work. I graduated in 1980. My husband, at that time, was also working to supplement the income. The interest rates were terrible. The winter of 1980 to 1981, when we were both working, we were just ... paying interest, like my whole pay cheque. It was discouraging (S.M.p.c.).

Between 1980 and 1985, S.M. was employed full-time as a Registered Nurse and she explained that by working full-time for five years, she would reach the top of her salary/benefit scale quickly. Her regular and fairly substantial income has allowed her husband to take up farming full-time (S.M.p.c.). At present, her income is no longer invested directly in the operation of the farm, yet it continues to contribute to the farm indirectly by meeting family needs. S.M. related:

None of my income goes to the farm at all. My income is just for the living for us. The things for the house and the family I can manage on my income. That is how it was always intended to be, except for that first year when we were both working; one of the pay cheques would go to the farm (p.c.).

S.M. told me that although the farm can now support itself financially, it does not support the family. Her income is therefore crucial in providing for all family needs which include everything from food to running the family car to paying all family and household bills (S.M.p.c.).

Since our interview, S.M. has adopted what she referred to as "part-time" hours, amounting to thirty-five hours per week, in order to relieve the time pressure somewhat (p.c.). "It was just getting too much", she said. She explained that, despite her off-farm job, the division of labour in the household still falls, to a large extent, along traditional lines. Sometimes, her husband helps with meal preparation but S.M. continues to do all housecleaning, shopping, laundering, mending, baking and so on. On average, she works four hours per day on domestic chores above and beyond her off-farm hours of work. Transporting children to activities consume an additional hour per day. S.M. is also involved in farm work during the growing season but added that she fills in only when needed, usually with combining and going for parts (p.c.). S.M. mentioned that she would like to be more directly involved in the farm operation but the family could not do without her off-farm income. She related:

I could probably work maybe a little bit less. Not much less, I don't suppose. I enjoy it but certainly we need it, because that is what we live on. I don't know how we would manage if I didn't work. I can't see how anyone could make it without working off the farm. There is no way (S.M.p.c.).

When asked whether her job gave her a sense of security, she replied: "Oh definitely, because I know that the money is coming and I don't have to worry about paying the bills and nobody is going to take my car away because I can't make the payments" (p.c.). It is evident from S.M.'s account that her off-farm income provides her family with a financial buffer.

K.N., like S.M., is a farm woman and Registered Nurse who works part-time in a nearby hospital. At the time of our interview, K.N. told me that the farm still generated enough income to support the family and cover farm expenses but that by renting more land and buying new equipment, she and her husband had incurred a high debt load. Although she asserted that her major reason for working off the farm was personal satisfaction, not economic necessity, she noted the financial contribution her income makes to farm and family.

We eat my money pretty well. So, I am definitely supporting or helping the farm in that regard, oh yes I am! It has definitely helped our banking situation, like the outlook at the bank ... It's a thousand dollars a month that isn't coming out of the farm account to pay for clothes and food and birthday presents, and so on. I do with it what is possible and then the farm picks up the slack. I use my money till it is gone and if I run out and there is still, say something like groceries [to be bought], he [husband] gives me money (K.N.p.c.).

K.N. said that she does little farm work. Her major contribution to the family and the farm is through the cash income she provides and her domestic work (p.c.). She explained that her off-farm job does not affect her domestic responsibilities. When asked whether her job off the farm has changed the division of labour within the household, K.N. exclaimed: "No! Not in this house, No! It's just one more job, you see" (p.c.).

As with K.N. in the last example, M.T.'s main contribution to the farm is through her domestic work and the cash income she provides as a full-time teacher. In response to the question "does your income go directly towards the farm?", M.T. said:

At one point yes, but at this point, no. Different farm purchases have been joint purchases (p.c.).

She explained how her income is allocated nowadays:

House purchases I usually make. When we were building the house, it was a joint thing [financially]. We worked together on it. It was sort of fifty-fifty. Furniture, food and groceries, I look after. Clothing as well (M.T.p.c.).

With respect to her children's educational and recreational expenses, M.T. noted that "all of that I look after" (p.c.).

M.T.'s off-farm income contributes to the farm operation by paying for family and household expenses, thus freeing farm income for reinvestment in the farm.

I think we could exist without my working. I think that my husband would find it quite a change though; he would find it quite a drain on his bank book if I were to make all of those purchases out of his bank book. I am not sure that he really realizes just how much we pay for food and clothing (M.T.p.c.).

As the economic crisis in agriculture begins to hurt even those farm families whose farm incomes have always been sufficient to support farm and family, women's financial contributions take on a buffering role. M.T., who worries about the ongoing low grain prices, fully realizes the buffering potential of her earnings.

I guess it is easier for us to feel better about it [low grain prices] because we are a two-income family and my having had a job all these years has certainly been an asset. The pay cheque is certainly helpful in the farm operation and, I guess, when there comes to be a crisis, it is not so much of a crisis as it might be otherwise (M.T.p.c.).



In summary, the examples presented bear witness to the substantial financial contribution of farm women through their off-farm incomes. Not only do they pay for family living expenses and extra-curricular activities, they often also invest their income directly into the farm operation. The current crisis in agriculture has made women's off-farm employment a widespread income-generating strategy.

#### 6.2.4 Women's Farm-Based Businesses

Off-farm employment is not the only way in which women make financial contributions to their farms. Interviews revealed that many are currently involved in a wide variety of farm-based, income-generating strategies some of which are reminiscent of cottage industries carried on by farm women in the past. My own research has resulted in a list which is quite extensive. The more traditional cottage industries include the production of cream, cottage cheese, vegetables, fruits, (both garden fruits and wild fruits), herbs, broiler chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks, eggs, honey, pickles, jams, jellies, fruit juices, preserves, bread, muffins, buns, pies, perogies, clothing and textiles (sewn, woven, knitted or crocheted articles), wool and mohair. These products are often marketed locally through such means as road-side stands, u-picks, farmers' markets, advertisements in local papers, or a network of private customers. Other income-generating activities include the production of greeting cards, signs, pottery, straw sculptures and other handicrafts, bedding

plants, woodwork and cabinetry. A range of services are also provided by women from the farm base such as income-tax preparation, auditing and other services using home computers, farm vacations, farm meals, horseback riding and stabling. Others include providing child care, doing contract work as a home economist, acting as a hunting guide and plucking wild fowl for clients, selling Avon, Tupperware, jewelery and the like. Some farm women are also involved in the private sale of beef, pork, mutton, and goats' milk.

Farm-based businesses are an alternative to off-farm employment. Several factors make them more feasible as income-generating strategies. For example, job opportunities and educational facilities to upgrade skills may be lacking. Constraints may be imposed by the need for child care or lack of transportation. Poor road conditions, long travel distances, domestic responsibilities and involvement in farm production chores may be barriers to taking off-farm jobs as well.

Little attention is given to women's farm-based income generation in the literature. The CRDC Study, for example, referred to the growing of fruits and vegetables, and the production of family clothing, household articles, food preserves and crafts as "home production" (1979:16) but did not mention the income-generating potential which is realized by farm women undertaking these and other pursuits for sale. In another study, Gisele Ireland's survey of farm women in Bruce and Grey Counties, Ontario, it was noted only that "some of the women (sixteen

percent) made extra money by raising chickens and selling eggs, raising rabbits or other fowl, or they were involved in craft production and sales" (Ireland, 1983:49). The marketing of services seems to have been overlooked. Ruth Berry's survey of Manitoba farm families revealed that "only 5 of the [120] families reported that they were involved in a non-agricultural family business such as craft sales or farm vacations" (1986:10). The survey did not address the marketing of raw and value-added farm products among the enterprises listed above.

Interviews with women who engage in income-generating activities on the farm give insight into why and what kind of activities are undertaken and how income derived from them is allocated. For example, farm woman K.R. of south-central Manitoba raises three hundred chickens in the summertime: 150 birds for meat and another 150 for eggs (K.R.p.c.). At one time, K.R. held a teaching position. However, having four babies in a short time curtailed many of her extra-domestic activities. She related:

I sell eggs [and meat]. So, I get a lot of pocket money and kid's money every week out of the chickens. Like, last year I had two thousand dollars from the chickens; eggs and meat sold. And, that is above and beyond what we consume. And, it is cash money! It is something I can do from here [the farm] and there is no time lost really (K.R.p.c.).

As the last comment indicates, to K.R. income generation on the farm is an alternative to off-farm employment. It is easier to combine with housework and child rearing. Although the farm is in sound financial shape, K.R.'s extra income contributes to the household budget.

In the case of T.D., the income earned through raising chickens for market is vital to the survival of her and her husband's farm in southwestern Manitoba. The crisis in agriculture has hit their farm particularly hard and T.D.'s husband has had to find off-farm employment which takes him away from the farm for usually one week at a time. As a result, T.D. and her four young children operate the farm. T.D. also custom bales straw on neighbouring farms, works off the farm as a school-bus driver, teaches driver education and raises four hundred chickens for sale (p.c.). T.D. is an example of a growing number of women who employ a variety of income-generating and economizing strategies simultaneously in an effort to rescue the farm from failure.

Informant, M.R. has adopted the production of cream as an income-generating activity on her and her husband's farm in southwestern Manitoba. The farm, a mixed operation producing field crops and hogs, needs the extra income to supplement the falling farm income. At the time of our interview, M.R. had nine milk cows and was selling cream, hoping that, with the extra money, the farm would break even (M.R.p.c.).

As with dairying and poultry raising, small-scale gardening on the side can prove to be profitable for those who need extra cash. A number of women on Manitoba farms have expanded their garden plots to incorporate the growing of vegetables, herbs and fruits for sale. Some have even cultivated large plots of vegetables and fruits, like strawberries and raspberries, as u-

pick outlets. For example, C.H. started her corn-selling business in 1985 when she and her husband had to close down the farm's hog operation for lack of investment capital. The loss of an average annual income of five thousand dollars which, as C.H. complained, was all they made on raising six hundred hogs a year, meant a serious reduction in their overall farm income and a threat to the family's standard of living (p.c.). In an effort to offset the effects of such a reduction, C.H. planted two acres of corn in 1985 and 1986. The following year, 1987, she expanded her corn plot to four acres. She related that the financial returns from marketing her corn help make ends meet on the farm (C.H.p.c.).

In the case of E.L., the income to be had from the sale of garden produce is also indispensable since the family was losing the farm and unable to cope financially without extra cash. She related:

Last year, the money we got selling [produce] was enough for us to live on financially for the summer. Especially last year, because we had strawberries [too] and they went for five dollars an icecream pail and that brought in quite a bit. We made four or five hundred dollars on which we were able to live for the summertime (E.L.p.c.).

In the case of informant, M.B., income from a farm-based industry is essential in making ends meet as well. She and her husband struggle with start-up debts at a time when prices of grain and cattle, their two main products, are at an all-time low. Her husband has an off-farm job which he can not afford to quit. "He has a job and a farm yet can't support the family!"

(M.B.p.c.). By trade a carpenter and cabinetmaker, M.B. has set up her own shop behind the house and custom builds furniture and other articles. At the time of the interview she was not working in the shop having just given birth. However, she explained how she normally allocates her income:

If I had my shop going, I paid all the household stuff out of it and all his [husband's] money from working out [off the farm] and from the farm went back into the farm. So, now I can't support the household from the shop and I expect it will have to come from the farm (M.B.p.c.).

She added, "When I have money in my account and a payment comes up, like with the tractor payments, and my husband doesn't have money in his account, then it comes out of my money to make a payment" (M.B.p.c.). The example of M.B. shows the buffering nature of her farm-based, income-generating activity, especially under conditions of sudden, acute financial need.

The next example involves C.T. who has always supplemented family income by carrying out a number of entrepreneurial activities on the farm. C.T. explained her income-generating strategy to me as follows:

I used to do a lot of ceramics and I sold most of my pieces. But I haven't done it for a while now. I don't like to lay out good money for something to make something. You have to buy the greenware and if you break it, or something happens to it, well, there is your profit gone. I rather get something for nothing and make it into something (C.T.p.c.).

With this philosophy in mind, C.T. began to undertake the following activities:

I used to go to rummage sales. They'll have clothes or dishes piled up that people have donated and they sell it. I go when the sale is almost over and say; "how much do you want for everything". I usually get a

half-ton truck load of clothing for ten to fifteen dollars. I bring it home and sort out the good from the poor stuff. The poor stuff is good for cleaning rags. I cut all the buttons off and zippers out and put it in bags. I have an outlet where I get fifty cents per pound for the cleaning rags. I sell about two hundred dollars worth a year. And I make quilts too. I take out the better pieces for quilts. I make mitts too, from jeans and old coat linings. They are good working mitts and I sell them for cash too. The kids get the good stuff. Some stuff you burn (C.T.p.c.).

Another business developed by C.T., together with her husband, was

going to auction sales and buying up antiques and other items which we later sold again. We still do that. We buy antique furniture and resell it to [an antique dealer] for a profit. Often, people in the neighbourhood will drop in to see if we have such and such for sale. I also have yard sales. I sell kettles and dishes and I made slippers and three afghans which I sold this summer. Sometimes, I load up my van and go into town. I have the stuff in the van and put up some tables outside. I did it three times this year. I go out to find a good spot where people will stop, especially in town where they go for groceries (C.T.p.c.).

Other sidelines are marketing copper salvage from old, electric motors and catering to hunters. With respect to this last activity, C.T. related:

We make some side money by being tourguides to a group of American hunters each year. We get twenty-five dollars per day for that. I've been cleaning geese for these Americans for years. I charge three dollars per goose and I do about ten geese in an hour and a half. I've bought a van for five hundred dollars with my money from cleaning birds ... The Americans usually stay for about one week. They stay right here on the farm in the old house. I clean house and cook for them and that makes some money too (C.T.p.c.).

C.T. told me that, because the farm was never a viable unit without income from other sources, her income from all these

entrepreneurial activities was vital in making ends meet. This was especially so when downturns in the farm economy exacerbated problems of cash flow, as is the case with the current crisis.

Other examples of farm-based businesses were documented in a series of articles published in the Manitoba Co-operator from September to November, 1986. In these articles, author Susan McLennan described Janet Breemersch's greenhouse and ceramics business, Ruth Wareham's auditing business, Mazo Black's farm-vacations business, Joan Thompson's sign-painting business and cake-decorating sideline, Cathy Wark's wheat weaving, and Marilyn Muller's Christmas-cake enterprise. All of these women have been in business for several years. As with other farm women entrepreneurs, these women noted the importance of flexible hours, allowing income-earning activities to take place around child care, homemaking and farm work. Cathy Wark explained, for example, "'you're not making a lot but it's a bonus for me. I have three kids, so I can stay at home and make a little extra on the side'" (Manitoba Co-operator, 25/9/86). She earns "'enough in a year to cover Christmas and to buy extras that normally we might not buy'" (ibid). Similarly, Ruth Wareham's accounting earns income "'used for things we otherwise normally wouldn't have from the farm'" (Manitoba Co-operator, 30/10/86). Joan Thompson's sign painting earned her between three and four thousand dollars in the winter of 1985-6. Most of this money went to supplement the farm income (Manitoba Co-operator, 10/10/86). Marilyn Muller's Christmas-cake business netted about



five thousand dollars in 1985. She remarked that "'it keeps us in groceries from about the first of October to the middle of January. Plus it pays for Christmas'" (Manitoba Co-operator, 02/10/86). The business helps keep the family in farming. "'It's the only way we can because the farm certainly isn't paying ... You just have to find ways you can stay'" (ibid). Without this income, the family would have to do without many things, she added (ibid).

In summary, it is evident from these accounts and those of my own informants that women's farm-based businesses provide their farms and families with vital income. Although some businesses are reminiscent of cottage industries of the past, many farm women today have had to come up with new products and services and adopt innovative marketing strategies to compete with factory-made products and cope with declining local markets resulting from rural depopulation.

### 6.3 CONCLUSION

Agriculture underwent major changes in the prosperous years following the Depression of the 1930s. Many farms specialized in commodity production and ceased to produce for family needs. Women who had always been heavily involved in subsistence production began to shift their energies to supplying household needs with commercial goods, a development facilitated by the advent of the automobile and the introduction of all-season roads. In addition, as mixed farming gave way to specialized

farming, women's production of a variety of farm products and value-added goods for income-generating purposes declined. Greater farm prosperity had reduced the need for extra income while other factors like competition from factory-made goods, declining local markets and strict production and sanitation regulations imposed by government, may have played an additional role. Although not a widely accepted practice, some farm women generated extra income through off-farm employment with which they contributed to the development of their farms.

As men became increasingly preoccupied by commodity production on growing, highly mechanized farms, women absorbed transportation services and farm administration in their work schedules. The decline of rural towns resulted in more time spent hauling grain, going for parts and doing the banking.

While their support services related to commodity production grew, women's direct participation in field work and commercial livestock raising remained limited on prosperous farms. This was due, in part, to the automation of tasks within commercial work processes enabling husbands to perform the bulk of the field and livestock-raising work, and the financial ability to hire help when necessary. Another factor may have been women's ongoing responsibilities for most domestic work, given that new household technologies had not resulted in a significant time saving in housework. In fact, child rearing laid an ever greater claim on women's time.

Farm specialization and the expansion and mechanization of commodity production, often with borrowed money, increased the vulnerability of farms to commodity-price fluctuations. The last decade has witnessed a severe crisis in agriculture as rising interest rates and input costs and declining prices have eroded the financial footing of farms. Farm women have responded by implementing economizing and income-generating strategies reminiscent of previous economic downturns. For example, many have reduced household expenditures but, whereas in the past family standards of living were buffered by mixed production for family provisioning, the decline in subsistence production on the farm has placed family well-being at jeopardy. Numerous farm women have responded by generating income through off-farm employment or farm-based businesses. The majority allocates this income to family needs. Therefore, from a historical perspective, women's economic roles on the farm have not changed. They still provide family subsistence needs. What has changed, however, is the way in which they do this. Farm women have shifted from in-kind contributions to family provisioning, to cash contributions.

Off-farm employment appears to be a more common strategy for generating income than it was in the past when farm-based businesses were more the norm. Some factors which might have contributed to this may be the availability of service-industry jobs and their accessibility through rapid, personal transportation. Perhaps more importantly, off-farm jobs provide

a large influx of regular income needed to meet consumer demands and farm debt loads associated with the highly capitalized farms of today. Many farm-based businesses, on the other hand, while providing critical income, are often seasonal and less lucrative. Moreover, the absence of traditional outlets such as local stores has also called for more innovative marketing. An additional factor in the trend towards women seeking off-farm employment may be the fact that children have become less active in contributing income to farm and family and more costly as consumers of goods and services.

Although farm women were less likely to take off-farm employment in the past, in part, because of labour constraints at home, they are now more likely to do so because the income is needed, even if this means a considerably heightened work load. In fact, many of these women carry triple work loads as they take on field-work and livestock-raising tasks to economize on labour expenses and buffer against labour shortages due to their husband's off-farm employment. Dwindling farm income in recent years has resulted in greater task sharing between men and women in commodity production, even though this does not seem to have translated into a significant increase in task sharing in housework to ease women's overall work load on the farm. In conclusion, farm women's work, whether in the home, in the fields, with the livestock, or on and off the farm to earn extra income, remains of vital importance to the viability of family farms in Manitoba.

## Chapter VII

### CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have set out to answer the question, what has been the nature of farm women's involvement in the development of agriculture in Manitoba? While a quantitative answer has not been offered, there can be no doubt that their contribution was large. The interdependence of men and women in farming has been demonstrated through descriptions of the work processes carried out by each gender against the background of ecological and economic conditions existing at a given point in time. Subsistence farming in the Red River Settlement and on the frontier called forth a sexual division of labour in which men and women, because of their specialized knowledge, were responsible for different work processes in which a considerable amount of task sharing took place. Food preservation and preparation, dairying and the manufacture and maintenance of clothing were female gender-specific work processes which complemented those for which the male gender was responsible such as grain growing, tool-making and construction of barns and fences. Task sharing occurred in such work processes as grain harvesting, haying, milking and gardening and, on the frontier, task sharing extended to clearing and breaking land and construction.

When large-scale, commodity field-crop production became dominant, men and women in prosperous farm areas tended to be less involved in each other's domains; task sharing diminished and a stricter segregation along gender lines in carrying out work processes became evident. Expanding acreages and farm work forces, as well as the industrialization of farm-commodity production and of domestic work processes were among the material conditions underlying this segregation. The industrialization of housekeeping reorganized the division of labour in domestic work, whereby the labour input of husbands and children diminished while that of women remained relatively unaffected at best.

A stricter segregation in no way diminished the complementary nature of women's and men's roles, however. A clear economic link between the domestic and the commercial sphere has been established. This link is immediately evident in poor economic times when women restrain household expenditures and intensify family-provisioning activities to uphold family well-being. This analysis is consistent with that of Anja Meulenbelt (1975) and that of Meg Luxton (1980).

It is perhaps the central role of women on prosperous farms as coordinators of domestic work processes that has become the model for contemporary stereotypes of farm women as exemplified by Friesen's description of farm women's work (Friesen, 1984:307-308). But contemporary stereotypes of farmers as men whereby farm women are not recognized as being integral to the farm economy are ill-founded. They stem from a narrow view that

equates farming with field work alone and recognizes farm women's economic role only as homemakers. In fact, farm women in marginal areas were prominent in field work. In prime areas where farm women were only occasionally involved in field work, they undertook other activities which contributed to the family and the farm operation. Women contributed indirectly by economizing and generating income for household expenses so as not to divert cash-crop income away from farm improvement and directly by investing in farm assets.

Women's central, economic contribution to farming has been overlooked or implicitly ascribed to males in general histories of Manitoba. It is widely recognized that each time the wheat economy failed, mixed farming was intensified; production of cream, eggs, poultry, garden crops and other farm products was stepped up. But the role of women in this production is left unacknowledged. For example, in describing mixed farming as a means of coping with the depression of 1882 to 1897, Friesen wrote: "This was a grain-growing province, but its farmers had sufficient animals and gardens to sustain their families in difficult times" (1984:218). Of the depression beginning after 1913, Morton claimed that "the farmer could meet depression by the sale of livestock and by increasing the production of milk, hogs and poultry, [even though] he could not prosper by doing so" (1967:330 emphasis added). Similarly, with respect to the depression following World War One, he asserted that:

As always in times of depression, farmers turned to dairying and poultry raising and the output from these occupations rose. The Manitoban farmer, accustomed to

deal only in lordly wheat, now learned many new skills, and came to respect the lowly egg and the ever hungry hog (1967:393).

Wheat cheques may have financed the bulk of farm improvements in prosperous years, but women's economizing and their income from the sale of butter, cream, poultry products, vegetables and country provisions provided the family and the farm with the material means critical to survival in poor economic times.

The economic importance of women's farm-based, income-generating activities became apparent only late in my research. While I arranged follow-up interviews to research them further, a great deal more must be learned, especially in light of their buffering nature in the current financial crisis in farming. More historical research is needed on cream, butter and poultry production, as well as on contemporary farm-based businesses. A cross-cultural comparison of women's farm-based income generation would be very fruitful. For example, the study by Ivy Pinchbeck (1981) about farm women in pre-industrial England exhibits many parallels with respect to women's economic contributions through cottage industries. It also reveals parallels with respect to family provisioning and farm labour, women's roles on marginal and prosperous farms, and the effects of higher prosperity levels as well as financial crises on farm women's economizing and income-generating activities.

Several other suggestions for further research come to mind. A study testing for correlation between the high failure rate of bachelor homesteaders and the absence of women as economic



partners may be revealing. A study of ethnic variability utilizing participant observation, bolstered by an examination of conditions in homelands would be of interest. An in-depth study of only one or two communities incorporating a study of how macro-processes have affected the community on a micro-level through history by tracing family lines, studying local histories and using participant observation over an extended period would be interesting. A study of farm women's contributions to the development of community services is needed. A great deal of work could be done with sources in the Manitoba Archives such as the papers of individual farm women, the papers of the United Farm Women of Manitoba, and those of the Women's Institute. Other rich primary sources are the Farmer's Advocate, the Norwest Farmer, the Grain Growers Guide and the Manitoba Co-operator. Finally, an inter-provincial comparison of farm women's work would be very helpful.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

### INFORMANTS

Code	Interview Date	Code	Interview Date
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#### Eastern Manitoba

C.H.	Nov. 87		
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#### Interlake Area

B.F.	Sept. 85	D.T.	Sept. 85
C.T.	Sept. 85 (2X)	U.T. (male)	Sept. 85 (2X)
M.U.	June 86	B.M.	Nov. 87

#### Red River Valley / South-central Manitoba

F.V.	Oct. 85	B.N.	Oct. 85
I.H. (male)	March 86	H.U.	Sept. 85
K.R.	Oct. 85	T.T.	Oct. 85
K.R.	Oct. 85	U.N.	Oct. 85
M.T. (male)	July 85		

Winnipeg group interview (March 86)

A.W. March 86  
J.H. March 86 (2X)  
E.H. March 86  
V.W. March 86  
D.L. March 86  
M.W. March 86

J.G.	Winter 86	J.S.	Summers 86 & 87
I.W. (male)	Nov. 87	D.N.	Nov. 87

Rathwell Area

Rathwell group interview (Sept. 85)

F.G. Sept. 85  
S.S. Sept. 85  
F.B. Sept. 85  
F.W. Sept. 85  
S.V. Sept. 85

H.C. (male)	Aug. & Sept. 85 (2X)	B.B. (male)	Sept. 85
M.N.	March 86	M.R.	Jan. 88
F.R.	Jan. 88		

Southwestern Manitoba

E.I.	July 85	N.I.	Oct. 85
K.I.	Oct. 85 & Dec. 87	F.I.	Oct. 85
C.I. (male)	Oct. 85	M.I.	Oct. 85

D.T.	Oct. 85	F.K.	Oct. 85
R.K. (male)	Oct. 85	M.R.	Oct. 85
W.R. (male)	Oct. 85	T.D.	Oct. 85
H.R. (male)	Oct. 85	F.E.	Aug. 87
E.N.	Aug. 87	N.O.	Aug. 87 & Oct. 87
M.O.	Oct. 87	E.C.	Oct. 87
J.S. (male)	Oct. 87	D.S. (male)	Oct. 87
G.S.	Oct. 87	N.A.	Nov. 87
M.A.	Nov. 87	C.U. (male)	Dec. 87
N.U.	Dec. 87		

Central Manitoba (Cardale / Minnedosa / Neepawa) Area

T.R.	Sept. 87	N.A.	Sept. 87
N.C.	Oct. 85	H.W.	Oct. 85
J.R.	Oct. 85	I.R. (male)	Oct. 85
E.R. (male)	Oct. 85	S.M.	Oct. 85
R.H.	Oct. 85	K.N.	Oct. 85
M.B.	Oct. 85	B.L.	Nov. 87
T.L.	Nov. 87		

West-central Manitoba (Birtle / Hamiota / Miniota) Area

N.E.	Sept. 85	B.E. (male)	Sept. 85
U.E.	Sept. 85	N.T.	Oct. 85 & Nov. 87
D.S. (male)	Oct. 85	W.G.	Oct. 85
N.G.	Oct. 85	C.F.	Oct. 85
D.D.	Oct. 85	B.D. (male)	Oct. 85

Riding Mountain Area

B.N.	Oct. 85	M.B.	Oct. 85
R.I.	Nov. 85	D.I. (male)	Nov. 85
F.D.	Nov. 85	Emma Carlson	Nov. 85
N.J.	Nov. 85	G.J. (male)	Nov. 85
O.L.	Nov. 85	M.L. (male)	Nov. 85
M.V.	Nov. 85	W.V. (male)	Nov. 85
E.L.	Nov. 85 & Aug. 87	L.L. (male)	Nov. 85 & Aug. 87
R.N.	Nov. 85	R.T.	Nov. 85
D.T.	Nov. 85	C.V.	Sept. 87

Dauphin / Swan River Area

G.W.	Nov. 85	J.T.	June 86
T.M.	Nov. 87	N.N.	Nov. 87

Saskatchewan

Liz Willick	Sept. 85	M.K.	Dec. 86
K.K.	Jan. 88	P.C.	Jan. 88
J.D.	Jan. 88		

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