

## *Frontiers in Home Economics*

**Frontiers are basically the same as fifty years ago—  
but now have different forms, different settings,  
and new implications**

VIOLA K. HANSEN

CLEAR INDICATIONS are that the home economics Extension program of the future will not be planned for organized groups alone. It will be a specific program planned to meet the needs of a defined audience. It will be taught on the audience's level of learning and in reference to specific needs.

The study to be discussed in this paper shows that Extension directors, state leaders, specialists, and lay home economics leaders believe that home economics Extension programs should be focused on meeting the educational needs of the homemaker. These respondents also reflect these beliefs: (1) that more attention should be given to programs that will aid the low socio-economic family in management of its limited resources and at the same time help members of such families raise the expected goals of their children; (2) that money management, problem in our society but taught on a credit should be taught to all groups in our society but taught on a level so they can comprehend the information being taught; and (3) that education in child development is appropriate. (Only lay leaders voted for an educational program on planned parenthood.)

When an organization or an agency arrives at mid-century it is fitting to evaluate accomplishments and project. This article reflects such a projection, undertaken initially at the request of the committee for the National State Leaders' Workshop. Ideas and suggestions were gathered from lectures, journals, and conferences. The first conclusion was that many of the frontiers for home economics are basically the same today as they were fifty years ago. But they

---

VIOLA K. HANSEN is Chairman of Home Economics Extension Programs, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

now have different forms, different settings, and new complications.

State leaders, Extension directors, state presidents and national officers of the National Homemakers Extension Council, and 50 supervisors and specialists were asked to check 33 ideas according to their importance as frontiers for home economics Extension work. Respondents were also asked to indicate the 10 most pertinent statements and rate them in order of importance. Of 200 questionnaires mailed, 138 were returned and tabulated.

Three types of frontiers were indicated: (1) frontier audiences to be reached; (2) frontier methods to be used; and (3) frontier subject-matter areas to be explored.

#### FRONTIER AUDIENCES

The consumer was identified as the prime audience to be reached (Table 1). Extension home economists have done much in this area in the past but have not identified themselves as consumer educators. Instead of talking about consumer information for rural and urban families, perhaps consumers should be classified in three groups:

1. Those who can buy luxury goods and services (the upper class).
2. Those who have to make choices in selecting goods and services.
3. Subsistence consumers who can buy only the necessities in goods and services and sometimes go without both (low socio-economic or disadvantaged families).

*Table 1.* Audiences to be reached through home economics Extension programs

Types of audiences	Percentage distribution			
	Lay leaders*	Ext. dirs.	State ldrs.	Specs. & supvs.
Specific audiences in specialized areas, e.g., money management for young families	50	64	84	46
Low socio-economic families	52	48	90	46
Consumers on money spending at all socio-economic levels	50	58	88	38

\* Includes state presidents and officers of National Homemakers Extension Council.

These consumer groups live in today's rural and urban areas. All need and want consumer information. Extension home economists have served the middle class well, but have taken for granted that

the luxury consumer already knows and therefore does not want or need information.

Most Extension workers seem to find it difficult to comprehend the needs of the subsistence group. For example, Kentucky clothing specialists and agents were amazed at the quality of secondhand garments available in mission clothing stores in Eastern Kentucky. Until recently few had explored these stores to see what was available. (An "easy-to-read" clothing bulletin on points to consider in buying a new dress or a secondhand garment has been printed.)

Only two of the 33 questions posed to respondents were directed to a specific kind of consumer information. Nearly 70 per cent of the respondents felt there should be an educational program on the uses and abuses of credit. Extension has been teaching in this area for a long time. But at what level has the subject been taught? None of the bulletins on money management reviewed would likely be comprehended by the "subsistence family." Yet such families may suffer most from the abuses of credit. The second question had reference to problem solving, which is partially related to consumer information. Nearly three-fourths of the group felt we should teach the basic principles of problem solving. The largest percentage came from council presidents and state leaders. Orienting our youth programs to daily problem solving rather than to projects was ranked high by 85 per cent of the respondents.

#### *Low Socio-Economic Audiences*

The second audience in importance identified was the low socio-economic group. Could it be said that the Extension Service has been so busy helping the low-income families of the 30's and 40's move up, that those that are dropping behind today have somehow been forgotten? Need for specialized educational activities for low socio-economic families ranked among the highest—88 per cent checked it as a number one priority. Galbraith describes insular or island poverty as a community in which "everyone, or nearly everyone is poor."<sup>1</sup> Do not all states have more of these islands than we like to talk about?

Extension workers and local workers in the insular areas have too long been teaching recipients of donated foods how to use dried eggs, powdered milk, and, in the South, how to use yellow corn meal. We have hoped the family would grow a garden to supplement their diet, yet know that the majority of these people live on

<sup>1</sup>John K. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), pp. 325-26.

poor soil and their city counterparts live in brick ghettos. Are we putting our energies to their best use giving demonstrations on the use of donated foods? Or should we be sitting down with community, county, state, and national leaders to determine why we have this situation and what the possible alternatives are for solution? The latter is a much harder job.

More than 80 per cent of the respondents said we have a responsibility to raise the educational goals of young people from the low socio-economic groups. Friggens has related how a school superintendent raised the goals of his pupils by raising the goals of parents.<sup>2</sup> Here is a real frontier that could be copied in 4-H home economics projects for both boys and girls.

A third audience identified was families living in public housing. Only 56 per cent of the respondents felt this was important or even possible. One president wrote she has seen much time and talent wasted in this endeavor. Here is one place where research is badly needed.

#### FRONTIER METHODS

Forms of community development and television were explored. Regarding these methods there were differences of opinion among respondents across the board (Table 2). Could it be that we have

Table 2. Methods to be used by Extension home economists to reach specific audiences.

Methods to be used	Percentage distribution			
	Lay leaders*	Ext. dirs.	State ldrs.	Specs. & supvs.
Special training to service and organizational agency personnel in all areas of home economics	36	44	72	28
State-wide educational programs to solve problems common to the majority of the people	42	32	58	40
Great use of personnel from all parts of the university in meeting educational needs of people	50	56	66	38
Increase television programming	36	38	68	36
Teach home economics to families in other countries via telestar	40	10	16	10

\* Includes state presidents and officers of National Homemakers Extension Council.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Friggens, "Is the Negro Equal in Intelligence and Ability?" *Reader's Digest* (March, 1964), p. 83.

worked too long with special organized groups? As leaders, do we feel more secure with "our own" or could it be that state presidents feel a strong loyalty to Extension? They may even question sharing our services with others. One president wrote, "They can join our clubs and receive the training we receive."

One of the greatest needs may be to devise program planning methods that will go beyond traditional Extension groups into total community development. There was agreement in the use of total resources of our universities in programming, which is so necessary for effective community development.

#### FRONTIERS IN SUBJECT MATTER

This study shows a strong emphasis by those responding on education for good management in the home. (See Table 3.) The contrasts in interests in child development and education for planned parenthood are interesting. We are interested in the child after it is born but not in helping the unwanted child not to be born. There is more consistent thinking on the part of leaders and specialists than within the Extension administration. One of the greatest needs in working with low socio-economic groups may be in planned parenthood education. Very few of the respondents agreed with this—in fact, only 20 per cent. Lena Levine of Margaret Sanger Research Institute once said that she had never seen a mother so ignorant as to want to bring another baby into the world to be hungry, to have disease, or to live in the impoverished circumstances that she found

Table 3. Subject matter that should be emphasized by Extension home economists.

Subject-matter emphasis	Percentage distribution			
	Lay leaders*	Ext. dirs.	State ldrs.	Specs. & supvs.
Management and efficient use of resources (time and money)	46	38	86	34
Program on the uses and abuses of credit	48	42	76	34
Special programs in child development for parents of young children	30	48	82	36
Programs (in conjunction with a medical college) in planned parenthood	26	18	14	12

\* Includes state presidents and officers of National Homemakers Extension Council.

herself. It may not be appropriate to expect Extension home economists to become authorities in planned parenthood, but they should take every opportunity to encourage women of low socio-economic groups to see a doctor or the health nurse and to know that such information is available.

#### SUMMARY

Basically our frontiers have not changed greatly. They are now more complicated by change in family living from rural to urban and from home producing units to consumption units dependent upon one another for goods and services. As one foreigner put it, "You are a nation busy taking in one another's washing."

Respondents in this survey identified seven modern frontiers of Extension work in home economics as the following:

1. Give special attention to consumer information programs for families at all socio-economic levels.
2. Teach the basic principles of problem solving that will aid families in decision making for better family living.
3. Do more teaching to specified audiences in specialized areas of home economics, e.g., money management for young families.
4. Expand programs to include specialized educational activities to meet needs of low socio-economic families.
5. Help to raise the educational goals of young people who come from low socio-economic levels of society.
6. Help community leaders plan and carry out long-time action programs for community improvement.
7. Orient youth programs to daily-living problem solving rather than projects in skills.

Hardly a day passes when someone does not call attention to the hard cold fact that technological change is rushing ahead of our concern for human dignity and meaning of life. Home economists have emphasized the importance of balanced diets, harmonious colors throughout the house, a place for everything, and everything in its place. Somehow we have been weak in the real meaning of why. Too often we have forgotten that a home is a delicate organism of real living, full of opportunity for laughter, tears, and sharing of spontaneous activities. We have said that "home economics is the only family centered discipline" in our university curriculum. If we accept this concept we must keep our focus on the family as the training center for individual concern for human dignity and meaning for life. This must be the core to *modern frontiers*.