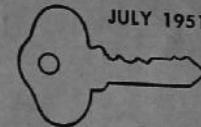


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Housing preferences of farm
families in the Northeast.
(Bulletin 872, July, 1951)

BULLETIN 872

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JULY 1951

Housing Preferences OF FARM FAMILIES IN THE NORTHEAST

JAMES E. MONTGOMERY

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Foreword

Many studies have been made to determine the state of repair and plumbing of housing units, ratio of tenant- and owner-occupied units, number of rooms, and the like. These studies, made along such quantitative lines and concerned with existing housing, have been useful enough because they have served as a "benchmark" of the type of housing we have.

Seldom, however, can we find in black and white a description of families' housing desires and expectations. With the benchmark established it is important that research be extended to this area.

This bulletin provides a beginning by pointing out family preferences on a number of highly important housing characteristics. It compares these preferences with the benchmark. The conclusion is reached that families want to improve many specific features of their present shelter accommodations.

The significance of "preference" information is discussed in the bulletin. In brief, it is concluded that this information is only one of the guides for planning better housing; but that on the other hand what different families in the same region and the same occupational group testify regarding their satisfactions and dissatisfactions must not be overlooked.

There are, of course, many broad factors which have a direct influence on the housing situation of families; for example, there are vast basic differences between housing of families in the North and South and between that of urban and rural families. This means that intensive, rather than extensive, study is appropriate. The study upon which this bulletin is based, which was undertaken by the Northeastern Farm Housing Technical Committee, limits the geographic area considered to the Northeastern region of the United States and the occupation to that of farming.

Glenn H. Beyer, Professor of Housing and Design and Director of the Cornell University Housing Research Center

Housing Preferences of Farm Families in the Northeast

by James E. Montgomery*

If houses are to meet to a maximum the many needs and requirements of the individual family, we must understand the people to be housed. However, our understanding of housing needs of families from the standpoint of such factors as social class, income, size, stage in the family life cycle, occupation, and geographic area, numerous household activities and likes and dislikes is very limited.¹ This lack of basic understanding appears to be particularly great when contrasted with advances in knowledge of such closely related subjects as, for example, building materials and processes.

The purpose of this bulletin is to indicate to architects, engineers, builders, home economists, social scientists, and educators generally, certain preferences in housing recently expressed by farm families in 12 Northeastern States. In order that the reader may know the differential between family preferences and actual conditions, usually both have been analyzed. Three major categories of preferences are examined: (1) those toward the house in general; (2) those toward space for performing selected activities in the house; and (3) those toward major items of equipment.

Source Material

This bulletin is based primarily on information developed in a housing survey of 607 farm families² living on owner-operated farms in the 12 Northeastern States. The survey was financed in large part with funds from the Research and Marketing Act of 1946, and was undertaken in 1948 by the agricultural experiment stations in the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and West Virginia, and the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture.

The survey was a part of a larger research project which has two phases. Phase one included the field survey mentioned above, the analysis of the findings, and the publication of the detailed results in a report entitled

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¹For an elaboration of this point of view see *Building for Modern Man*, p. 19-25, by Thomas Creighton, ed., 1949; *Housing and Citizenship: A Study of Low-Cost Housing*, p. 116, by George Herbert Gray, 1946; and *Tomorrow's House*, p. 1-9, by George Nelson and Henry Wright, 1946.

²The Master Sample of Agriculture was used in selecting the families interviewed. The sample is estimated to represent a universe of 183,200 farm families.

*Farm Housing in the Northeast.*³ Phase two, now underway, includes the use of the data published in the report, in laboratory work to develop "basic dimensions and arrangements for space and equipment, and the structural and facility requirements of the farmhouse which provide for family health and for safety and comfort with economy of structure and maintenance".

This bulletin provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of the findings regarding housing preferences presented in the initial report, together with further analysis of some of the findings of the survey not presented in that report.

Function of "Family Preferences" in House Planning

In recent years much attention has been given to "preference" information as related to political, economic, and social issues. Many substantial books and articles have been concerned with such problems as the formation, intensity, constancy, function, and measurement of various attitudes, beliefs, and opinions.⁴ This bulletin does not attempt to summarize these findings; nevertheless, the importance of the subject does warrant a few brief comments.

First, it is known that preferences are learned. They may be formed in a number of ways.

1. They may be acquired unconsciously as a part of the folkways or mores of the family, particular social class, or neighborhood — for example, one's economic and social beliefs.
2. They may be acquired by actual contact with objects and ideas — for example, a person may work at a number of jobs and finally choose one over all others.
3. They may be learned through mass media of communication — for example, a person's preference for a favorite brand of cigarettes.
4. They may be developed as a result of educational agencies — for example, one's occupational preference.
5. Finally they may be acquired through a combination of circumstances — for example, a person may arrive at a choice of a certain type of automobile as a result of driving different makes, by hearing radio commercials, and by talking with neighbors.

Second, preferences may change greatly from time to time among families and within a given family. And of course the converse is true: some preferences may be relatively fixed or stable.

Third, preferences vary in intensity. For instance, at one end of the continuum, some person might have a very strong liking for an object

³*Farm Housing in the Northeast: A Survey of Facilities, Activities, Possessions, and Preferences of Families on Owner-Operated Farms*, by Glenn H. Beyer, with the assistance of the Northeastern Farm House Technical Committee, 1949. The writer wishes to acknowledge the helpful suggestions and criticisms of Professor Glenn H. Beyer.

⁴For a detailed explanation of the subject, see *Measuring Consumer Interest*, p. 39-84, by G. West Chuimann, Russel L. Ackoff, and Murray Wax, eds., 1947; *Public Opinion and Propaganda*, p. 125-173, by Leonard W. Doob, 1948; *Theory and Problems of Social Psychology*, p. 175-209, by David Krech and Richard S. Crutchfield, 1948; and *Social Control*, p. 385-403, by Joseph S. Roucek, ed., 1947.

or idea and, at the other extreme, some person might have a very strong dislike for the same object or idea.

Certain characteristics of housing should be pointed out so that a sound evaluation of preferences in this area may be made.

1. In the first place, the house is a relatively durable product. Most families buy only one, or at most two, houses; but they buy several automobiles, dozens of pairs of shoes, and hundreds of pounds of coffee.

2. No house brands are offered for sale by highly organized concerns. Therefore, families are not constantly confronted with a decision regarding the advantages of this and the disadvantages of that particular brand.

3. Finally, the families discussed here have probably lived in a farmhouse most, if not all, of their lives. Thus, they should be completely familiar with at least one type of farmhouse.

However, it would be a mistake to imply that all housing preferences, despite the durability of this commodity, are of equal constancy. For instance, preference may change when a family's economic status, experience, education, size, and needs change.

On the surface, some preferences of families may appear unrealistic, but if the reasons for a particular opinion were known, they might assume psychological significance. For instance, as noted later, many of the farm families in the Northeast who now have wood and/or coal burning ranges say that they want to continue with them rather than change to the gas or electric type. It appears plausible in this instance that this type of range, which has been used for many years, serves various functions in addition to cooking: it is almost always used to supplement the heating system (often a space heater) in the large farmhouses in this region. The wood and coal range also serves as an incinerator for discarded paper. Furthermore, the wood for fuel is available on many farms.

Many persons, on the other hand, may not know the reason for some of their preferences.

It is recognized that many factors must be considered in planning new, or improving old, houses: family income, cultural background, location of house, family composition, family activities and special interests, and finally, preferences. Preferences should not serve as sole determinants because in many instances, when they are tempered by the other factors mentioned, they may be mere wishful thinking and never expressed in a market demand.

However, preferences should be of use as *partial guides* to persons actively interested in house planning. In those instances where families prefer a certain arrangement known to be at variance with commonly acceptable standards, architects, contractors, appliance producers, and educators should feel challenged to help reduce these lags.

But actually there are many instances at which there is no best arrangement or solution. In others, there may be a most "reasonable" way, but "reasonableness" is only one of several functions considered by farm fam-

lies. If a functional house is one that meets to a maximum the physical, social, psychological, and economic needs of the people living in it, then good houses must be good in terms of the value system of the occupants.

General Characteristics of Families Studied⁵

Of the 607 families studied, two-thirds were those of full-time farmers, and one-third those of part-time farmers.⁶ From the standpoint of agricultural production, 62 per cent of heads of families are dairy farmers, 10 per cent poultry farmers, and 28 per cent producers of fruit and nuts, vegetables, other field crops, forest products, and livestock.

Family income, indisputably one of the most influential factors affecting the type of housing, varies sharply. In order that this factor may be given proper weight in the analysis, families are classified as nearly as possible according to cash income. The general bases for determining the economic stratum into which a family could be placed are: (1) the number of "productive-man-work units" for full-time farmers⁷ and (2) work-units plus other employment and other income for part-time farmers. The percentages of families in the three economic strata are as follows:

Upper economic group.....	22.3
Middle economic group.....	56.5
Lower economic group.....	21.2
Total.....	100.0

In view of the close relationship between a family's income and its housing, usually this analysis examines housing preferences and conditions for each of the three economic groups. However, when materials by economic strata are not available and when economic variations are only slight, data covering all economic groups combined will be used.

Farm families in the region are slightly smaller in size (median of 3.40 persons) than farm families in the United States as a whole (median of 3.55).⁸

Prominent differences in size of the present family for the three economic groups can be observed in figure 1. The facts presented in this figure may be contrary to popular expectation. Usually it is believed that

⁵Geographically, conditions in the Northeast vary greatly from Maine to West Virginia; due to a geographic difference. For instance, dwellings in the northern part of the region are older than in areas lying within the Appalachian Mountain. Moreover, proportionately more houses in the northern sector of the region have 1 and ½ stories than in any other part of the area. Wood is used as fuel in the north more often than elsewhere, and coal is used more frequently in West Virginia.

Geographic factors to some extent influence housing preferences, but to a lesser extent than such factors as income, size of family, and stages of the family life cycle. Therefore in the analysis to follow no further reference will be made to the import of geographic location on family preferences.

⁶A full-time farmer is one who devotes full time to his farm and who has no other gainful employment. A part-time farmer is one who devotes a part of his time to farming and a part to some other kind of employment.

⁷Here a productive-man-work unit is defined as the amount of productive work accomplished by a man in one 10-hour day, working at a rate average for the region as a whole. For a fuller account of the Northeastern Farm House Technic Committee, 1949, and *Farm Management and Marketing*, p. 69, by V. B. Hart, M. C. Bond, and L. E. Cunningham, 1942.

⁸United States Census, Series P, 20, No. 21, p. 12, 1948.

ECONOMIC GROUPS

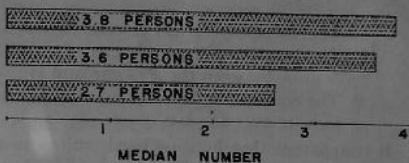


Figure 1. Number of persons per family, by economic groups (expressed in medians).

the lower the income, the larger the family. The main reason for the converse among farm families in this region seems to be that more sons and daughters from farms with small operation than from more productive farms leave to seek a livelihood elsewhere.⁹

A more detailed picture of the relationship of size of family to economic group is shown in figure 2. From this figure it can be seen that a much higher percentage of large families (those of 7 or more persons) are in the upper economic group (28 per cent) than of small families (only 18 per cent). Conversely, a much higher percentage of small families (those of 3 or fewer persons) are in the lower economic group (31 per cent) than of large families (only 7 per cent).

The last factor to be briefly mentioned here is the concept of the family life cycle. Between its beginning and termination, a family usually passes through a life cycle that may be defined as follows:

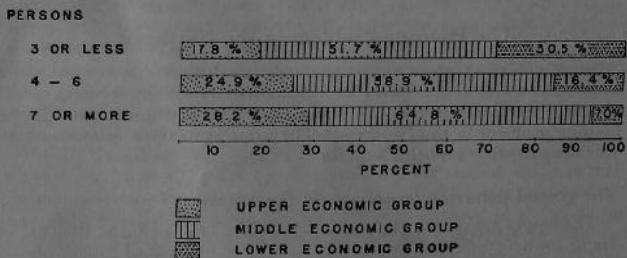


Figure 2. Economic groups, by size of family.

⁹The findings are in agreement with the conclusions drawn in a recent Bureau of Agricultural Economics Enumerative Survey for New York State and with other studies made by the New York State Colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics.

- (1) The young couple (beginning of the cycle) — no children, wife under 35 years of age
- (2) The founding family — some children, all under the age of 8
- (3) The expanding family (peak of the cycle) — some children, one or more between the ages of 8 and 17
- (4) The contracting family (end of the cycle) — no children under age 18, wife over 35 years of age.

It is apparent that housing needs and requirements are dynamic, but in all too many instances dynamic families are forced to adapt themselves to relatively static and inflexible houses. The change in a family's housing requirements is indeed difficult to evaluate when building new or when remodeling old houses. For instance, a young couple may need only one bedroom, but at the peak of the cycle they may need three or four bedrooms. If these are provided, then perhaps at the end of the cycle there will be a surplus of sleeping areas to be heated, furnished, and maintained. Moreover, there is an important relationship between a family's income and expenses and its stage in the life cycle. From a financial point of view, the stages of the founding and the contracting family are likely to be the most crucial ones.¹⁰

For urban families this dynamic factor is resolved at least in part by the relatively large number of housing units available in the urban market. It is not uncommon in a city for many families to move from one dwelling unit to another at least every few years to meet their changing needs and desires. For rural families, however, the number of housing units available is much more limited, and, even more important, the house is attached to the farm, and, therefore, to the family's livelihood.

In the pages that follow some of the more important associations between preferences and the stage of the family in its life cycle are noted.

The Housing Problem in the Northeast

Before analyzing preferences that farm families express toward their housing, two questions should be considered: (1) What is the general nature of the farmhouse in this region? and (2) Specifically, what is the housing problem in the Northeast? The answers to these questions provide the perspective for this bulletin.

The general nature of farmhouses in the Northeast

The houses are old, single-family structures 2 or 2½ stories; they are of frame construction, and have a relatively large number of rooms, one or more porches, a basement or cellar, and space divided into distinct and separate rooms, that is, "closed" floor plans. Undoubtedly the two most important of these characteristics are age and size (size, in fact, being

¹⁰See *Houses for Family Living*, by Frederick Gutheim, 1948.

related to age). Age is an index to type of construction. Size indicates whether the problem is one of (a) increasing floor area, (b) improving the use of existing space, or (c) a combination of (a) and (b).

The housing problem in the Northeast

The over-all problem is one of rearranging the space in the relatively large houses and of installing (in some instances improving) modern equipment and providing more adequate storage areas. Unlike the urban situation over the nation, overcrowding is not a problem among the families included in this study. It is not a problem generally for any economic level. For example, observing the lower economic group of families, the median size is 2.7 persons, and the median number of rooms is 6.8. For the upper economic group the median size of family is 3.8 persons, and the median number of rooms, 7.8.¹¹

The principal reasons why the housing problem among farm families in this region is rearrangement of space and improving utilities are not difficult to understand. When most of the houses were built, family needs and requirements were very different from what they are today. Furthermore, building skills, materials, and equipment also were very different from those of the present.

When most of these houses were built families were large, and relatives and hired hands frequently made the number of persons per house even larger. Even if these houses were often poorly arranged, there were enough members in the household and enough division of labor to compensate largely for a lack of convenience and labor-saving arrangement. Moreover, roads were poor, transportation inadequate, and, therefore, trips to market were infrequent. Pantries and cellars were needed as storage areas for large quantities of supplies.

Another reason why space arrangements in those houses were far different from what many families want today was the method of heating the house. The relative inefficiency of space heaters and other types of stoves was such that dividing the house into cubes was a necessity. "Open-floor" plans would have posed a heating problem impossible of solution. And, of course, modern plumbing and electric current lay in the somewhat distant future.

Finally, building skills and materials placed many limitations on the houses built 50 to 100 years ago. For instance, the trussed roof was relatively unknown; therefore most partitions in the houses were load-bearing. And the principal technique for building roofs capable of withstanding heavy snow loads was a steep gable. Timber was abundant for framing and native stone for foundations. Concrete, steel, and boards for dry-wall construction as domestic building materials were practically unknown. Knowledge of insulation was very elementary, and large double-glazed

¹¹Although overcrowding is not a general problem, about one-fourth of the families do prefer one or more additional rooms.

windows were yet to be invented.

Building skills and materials were such that many of the farmhouses in the Northeast have been durable, but needs and requirements of farm families have changed sharply. The current high cost of building, sentimental identification, and so on, with many of these old houses are such that the task is usually one of alteration rather than one of building a new house.

Preferences Toward the House in General

Most farm families in the Northeast want to improve or put to other than current use certain features of their housing units. Others want new or additional features. To illustrate, more than a third of the houses still have only a cellar, but nearly all families want a basement in which to carry on various activities which they now have to perform in other locations. Many families want additional clothes closets and linen closets.

This section of the bulletin examines preferences of families in relation to such characteristics of the house as number of stories, number of bedrooms, porches, basements and cellars, bathrooms, and storage space.

Number of stories

Well over half of all farm families in the region prefer houses with 1 or $1\frac{1}{2}$ stories, but, meanwhile, only one-fourth now occupy dwellings of this type. This preference is more pronounced among families in the lower economic group (figure 3).

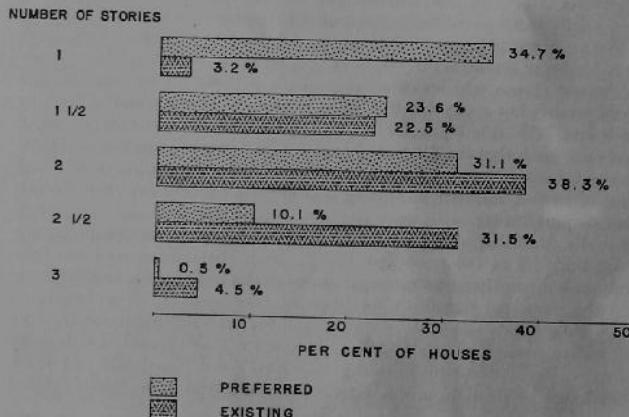


Figure 3. Preferred and existing number of stories of houses.

Undoubtedly a general reason for this situation is the fact that families more and more prefer to "live on one floor". But the fact that this trend is accentuated among families in the lower income group, where families are smallest, indicates an association between this preference and family size and income.

Among the existing houses, two out of every five are over 100 years old, whereas only one out of four is less than 50 years old. (The median age is 79 years.) Today's farm family is much smaller than its predecessor; it places more emphasis on convenience, and it carries on fewer activities in the house. For instance, farm families now depend more on hospitals, schools, bakeries, drug stores, and department stores than they did a few decades ago. Even so, the farmhouse continues to be the center of numerous and varied activities — far more so than the urban home.

Number of rooms

As explained on page 11, overcrowding is not a problem among farm families in the Northeast. The median number of rooms per house is 7.1, and the median number of persons per family is 3.4, a low "density" rate of more than 2 rooms per person. The median number of rooms per house in relation to the median number of persons per room for each of the economic groups is as follows:

	Median number of rooms per house	Median number of persons per family
Upper	7.6	3.8
Middle	7.2	3.6
Lower	6.8	2.7

Porches

Porches have long been a characteristic of northeastern farmhouses, and will continue to be, since families want to use them for a relatively large number of activities. Between a half and three-fourths of all families express a desire for both a front and a back porch. Among families wanting one or the other, slightly more favor a front porch (figure 4.) At present practically all farmhouses in the region have both porches.

There are several prevalent types of porches — open, screened, glassed-in, etc. Almost two-thirds of the families want both front and back porches to be enclosed with screens or glass, or a combination of the two. Families in the upper economic group tend to place more emphasis on screened porches as contrasted with a preference of families in the other two economic groups for glassed-in porches. One possible explanation for this is the fact that the porch serves as a wind-break for houses not so well heated.

The porch is a very important part of the farmhouse. It has many and varied uses in the summer but fewer in the winter (table 1).

There is a strong indication porches will continue to be preferred on

Table 1. Preferred uses of all porches in summer and winter

Use	Summer (Per cent of all families)	Winter
Sitting, leisure, reading	85.5	15.5
Eating	23.6	1.0
Food preparation	32.5	1.5
Drying clothes	17.2	34.6
Ironing	8.2	1.0
Other recreation or play	7.9	2.9
Washing clothes	5.6	2.2
Storage	4.8	15.7
Other	21.0	13.5

porches will need to be better planned, better equipped, and made more of an integral part of the house. In some instances porches may even be omitted.

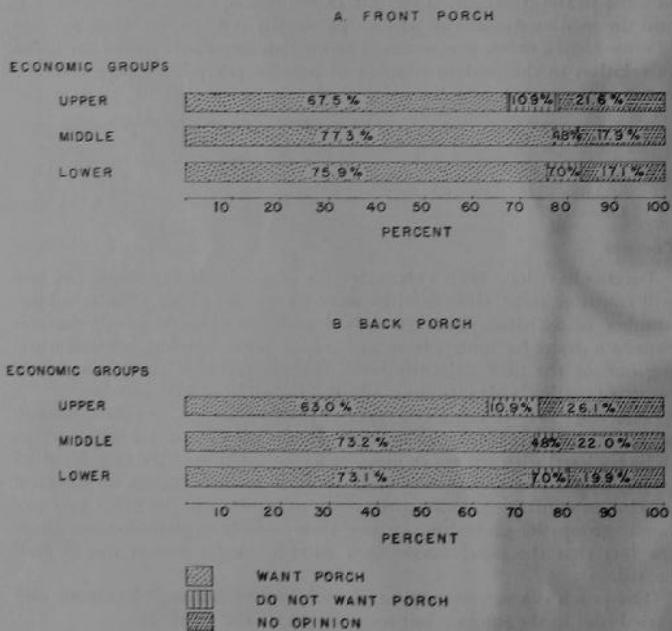


Figure 4. Percentage of families preferring front and back porches, by economic groups.

Basement and cellar

Farmhouses in the Northeast usually have a basement or cellar. If a distinction can be made between the two by the type of floor, approximately 37 per cent have a cellar (that is, with dirt floor), and the remaining 63 per cent have a basement (that is, a floor of other than dirt — usually concrete covering all or part of the space). In about half of the houses, the basement or cellar is under only a part of the house. Most of the cellars and many of the basements are poorly planned, poorly equipped, poorly heated and lighted, poorly ventilated, and damp.

Nearly all farm families in the region want a basement. Therefore, in more than a third of the houses cellars would have to undergo major improvements.

The purposes for which families would like to use basements are indicated in figure 5.

Number of bedrooms

Most families prefer houses with either 3 or 4 bedrooms. Actually in many houses there is now an excess of bedrooms. (The median number of bedrooms per house is 3.5 and the median number of persons per family

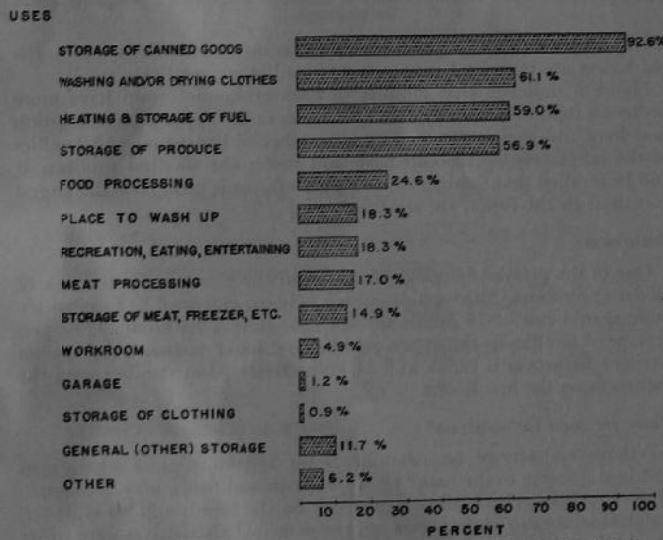
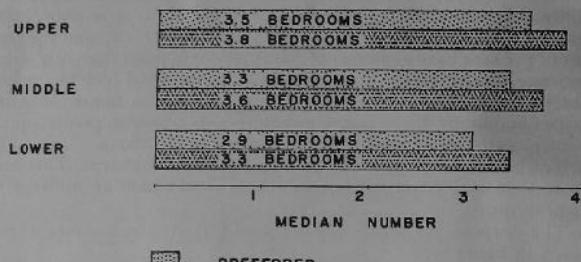


Figure 5. Percentage of families preferring to use basement for specific activities.

ECONOMIC GROUPS

BECAUSE OF LACK OF DATA, FIGURES ON PREFERENCE APPLY ONLY TO FAMILIES WHO STATED A PREFERENCE FOR EITHER 1 1/2 OR 2 STORY HOUSES.

Figure 6. Preferred and existing number of bedrooms, by economic groups (expressed in medians).

is 3.4.) This condition is understandable because, as has been shown, the old houses are large and most present families are relatively small.

Figure 6 indicates that families in each economic group have more bedrooms than they actually prefer. Families in the upper economic group now have and also prefer the largest number of bedrooms, and families in the lower economic group have and prefer the smallest number. It will be recalled that families in the upper economic group are the largest and those in the lower, the smallest.

Bathroom

One of the greatest housing difficulties in the Northeast is the lack of modern plumbing. Although plumbing is being extended to farmhouses, more than 4 out of 10 houses do not now have a bathroom. The percentage of families in the upper, middle, and lower economic groups not having a bathroom is 22, 45, and 54, respectively. Most families want the bathroom on the first floor.

Place for men to "wash-up"

A large majority of farm families want a definite place where men and boys, coming to the house from the barns and fields, may "wash-up". However, there is no general agreement on the location. This is understandable since until a few years ago the principal alternatives were either the kitchen or a porch. But now with modern plumbing and better

planning, these alternatives are greatly increased. Figure 7 indicates the numerous places where homemakers think men and boys should "wash-up".

It is of interest to note in figure 7 that almost one-fourth of the families think that this activity should take place in a laundry or wash room, an arrangement afforded by few of the houses today. Meanwhile, the small proportion of families who think the activity should be performed in the kitchen or porch indicates dissatisfaction with a practice of long standing.

Laundry and utility rooms

Only 1 out of every 20 farmhouses in the region now has a laundry room, and only 1 out of 10 has a specifically designated utility room, work room, or back room.

On the other hand, approximately one-third of the families would prefer to do their washing, and one-fourth, their ironing, in a laundry room.

The utility room, work room, or back room is not preferred by a high percentage of families as a location for any specific task; however between 10 and 15 per cent of the families desire this type of room for such tasks as laundry work, preserving food, packing eggs and dressing poultry, and as a place for men to "wash-up".

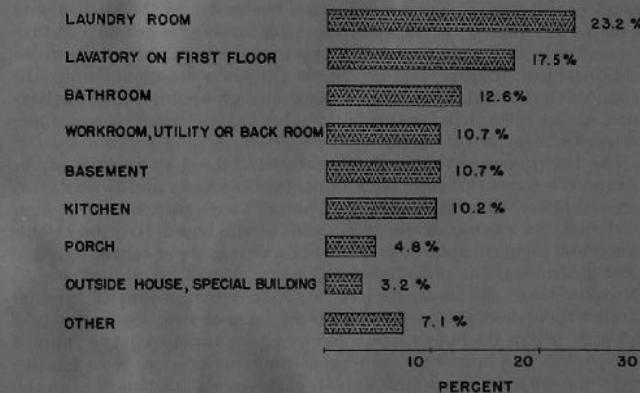
LOCATIONS

Figure 7. Percentage of families preferring specific locations for men to "wash up".

Office space in house

Some two-thirds of all families express a desire for an office or desk space for use in business operations. Actually less than 2 per cent of all the families in the region now have an office in the house. The preference between office and desk space varies sharply according to income groups. For instance, the percentage of families in the upper, middle, and lower groups wanting space for business transactions is 70, 65, and 54, respectively. Of those wanting either an office or desk space, 44.0 per cent of the families in the upper economic group want an office, as contrasted with only 29 per cent in the middle and 23 per cent in the lower economic groups.

Many families that expressed a desire for a separate office would like to have it include a desk, chair, telephone, and filing cabinet. A much smaller percentage would like to have it include a cot or couch, table, bookcase, and easy chair. Moreover, about 72 per cent of those wanting an office state that it should have a back door. For families who prefer a desk only, most would like to have it provided in the living room or dining room.

Storage space

One of the greatest dissatisfactions of families with respect to their dwellings is the lack of adequate and convenient storage space. Approximately half of the families want more and better arranged storage space despite the size of the houses they occupy. Of the families expressing a desire for more storage space, about one-third want more bedroom closets, another third more storage for dishes and equipment in the kitchen, and slightly more than a fourth, more space for storing linen and bedding.

Families in the upper economic group express the greatest concern for additional storage space, and families in the lower economic group, the least. Although families in the upper economic group now have relatively more storage space than families in the other groups, they also have more of specific items to be stored.

The inadequacy of storage space is closely related to the age of the houses. When most of them were built, clothes closets and linen closets were relatively uncommon. (Clothes "presses" were used for the storage of clothes.) As a consequence, 17 per cent of the houses have no clothes closets and the median number for the remaining 83 per cent is only 2.1. (The median number of bedrooms per house, it will be recalled, is 3.5.) Of course these old houses do have a considerable amount of "storage area", frequently in the nature of an extra room or two.

Nearly half of the houses have a pantry where various kitchen supplies and equipment can be kept, and about the same percentage of families prefer a pantry. Although undoubtedly there are some advantages to this auxiliary to the kitchen, it is believed that if more of the families had

experience with and knowledge of modern kitchens, where supplies and equipment are stored near place of first use, fewer of them might prefer pantries.¹²

Attics also are prominent as storage areas in the Northeast, as would be expected. Some two-thirds of the families use attics for this purpose, and approximately the same percentage of families want to continue to have this space for storage. Although some houses are being built without attics, the American Public Health Association points out that properly lighted and ventilated attics can be convenient as storage areas for miscellaneous items that are used relatively infrequently.¹³

Preferences Toward Space for Performing Selected Activities

This section examines preferences for space in which to prepare and serve food; space for entertaining guests and for children's play; and, finally, space for laundering and mending clothes and sewing. As is true of preferences toward the general structure of the house, many families want to improve the conditions under which various activities are performed.

Serving meals

Since preparing and serving food is one of the most time-consuming activities in the farmhouse,¹⁴ it is easy to understand why many families desire changes that would make their work more convenient and more pleasant. This activity involves both regular family meals and frequent company meals. With respect to the former, the median number of persons served is: breakfast 3.3, lunch 2.5, and evening meal 3.6. These figures include persons who eat almost every day with the family. In addition to these, "extra" persons (for instance, the county agricultural agent, children home from school, etc.) often eat with the family. And, of course, during certain seasons of the year the number of persons served at regular meals is even greater.

Practically all families, at times in the course of a year, serve company meals. More important, about two-thirds serve company meals once a month or oftener. Among families that serve company meals, the practice is slightly more prevalent in the lower than in the middle or upper economic groups. The median number of guests served per company meal (in addition to regular family members) for upper, middle, and lower income families is 4.7, 5.0, and 4.8, respectively.

Farm families prefer a kitchen large enough and sufficiently well planned to accommodate regular meal service for approximately 6 per-

¹²See *Planning Your Home for Better Living*, p. 80, by Clarence W. Dunham and Milton D. Thalberg, 1945; *Basic Distances of 110 Farm Houses for Preparing and Serving Food and Washing Dishes*, p. 245, by Clara Ann Ridder (Thesis for degree of Ph.D., Cornell University, unpublished), 1950.

¹³American Public Health Association, Committee on the Hygiene of Housing, *Planning the Home for Occupancy*, p. 42, 1950. See also *Shelter for Living*, p. 121, by Ernst Pickering, 6th ed., 1947.

¹⁴See *Use of Time in Its Relation to Home Management*, p. 19, by Jean Warren (Cornell Univ. Exp. Sta. Bul. 794, 1940.)

sons. Information is not available for the Northeastern Region on the relative adequacy of the kitchen from the standpoint of serving meals, nor from the standpoint of changes families now prefer, but it is known that many improvements could be made. Ridder, for example, in a study of 100 families on owner-operated farms in Seneca County, New York, found that most kitchens were not nearly so well arranged as the structure would permit.¹⁵

Some four-fifths of the families in the Northeast prefer to serve some meals in a dining room. (An equal percentage now have this room.) These families would like a dining room large enough to accommodate 10 persons. It is interesting to note that families indicate that this room would be used primarily for serving company meals. (The percentage of families who would like to serve regular meals here is insignificant.) There are indications that families are beginning to de-emphasize the importance of a dining room. At any rate, if families had to choose certain rooms in a 5-room house, most of them would prefer a dwelling with three bedrooms rather than one with two bedrooms and a dining room.

One-fifth of the families would like to serve some meals or refreshments on a porch. A few would like to serve meals or refreshments in the living room, but virtually none shows a desire for a dinette.

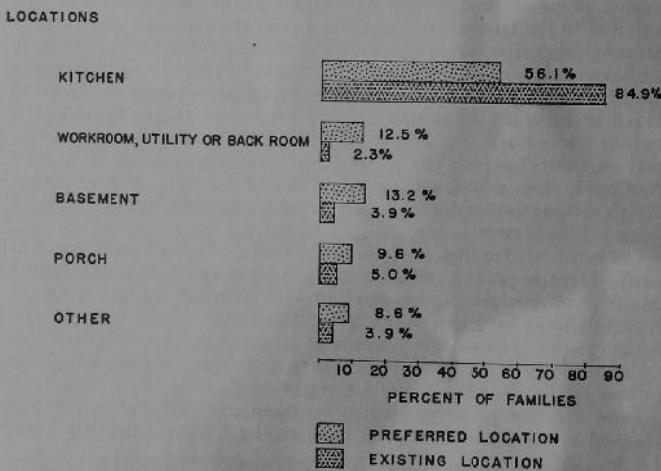


Figure 8. Preferred and existing locations for preparing food for canning and freezing.

¹⁵See *Basic Distances of 100 Farm Houses for Preparing and Serving Food and Washing Dishes*, p. 244, by Clara Ann Ridder (Thesis for degree of Ph.D., Cornell University, unpublished), 1950.

Food preparation other than for meals

An important activity in the farmhouse is the preparation of food other than for immediate meals. (This report does not investigate the problems of cooking for immediate meals.) For instance, almost all families preserve fruits and vegetables for future use. A higher percentage of families that have one or more children between the ages of 8 and 17 (that is, expanding families) preserve fruits and vegetables more often than do families in any other stage of the family cycle. The amount preserved does not vary significantly among families of different economic statuses.

Figure 8 indicates the areas within the house where families prefer to prepare food for canning and freezing and the ones where they now perform this activity. It is noteworthy that while 85 per cent of families now prepare food for canning and freezing in the kitchen — the most over-worked part of the farmhouse — actually only 56 per cent of all families would prefer to do this work in the kitchen.

Other closely related activities also take place in the kitchen. Approximately four-fifths of the families cut up meat for future use. This practice is somewhat more prevalent among families in the upper than in the

LOCATIONS

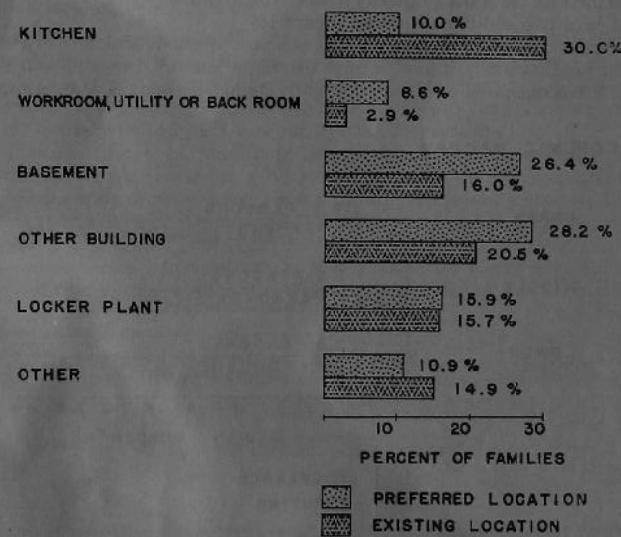


Figure 9. Preferred and existing locations for cutting up meat.

middle or lower income brackets. Moreover, there are significant differences among economic groups as to where families would like to carry on this activity. For instance, some 30 per cent of the families in the upper economic group would like to cut up their meat at a locker plant. The same location is suggested by only 11 per cent of the families in the middle and 13 per cent in the lower economic groups. The latter groups show a greater preference for the basement.

Figure 9 indicates that many families are now dissatisfied with the arrangement for meat cutting and that they differ noticeably as to where this activity should be performed.

Entertaining in the home

Each year some two-thirds of the families have get-togethers — reunions, teas, birthday parties, and the like. The median number of guests at a time is 9.7. Families in the founding and expanding stages of the cycle have social gatherings more often than those in the young couple and contracting stages.

One out of every 4 families now has both a living room and a parlor in its farmhouse. In general, however, the living room (presumably where there is no parlor) is smaller than the size preferred. Families would prefer to increase the seating capacity in the living room enough to accommodate at least two additional persons (figure 10).

At various intervals in the course of a year approximately 87 per cent of the families entertain one or more overnight guests. Of these, about 1 out of 3 has one guest at a time; a slightly higher percentage, 2 persons at a

ECONOMIC GROUPS

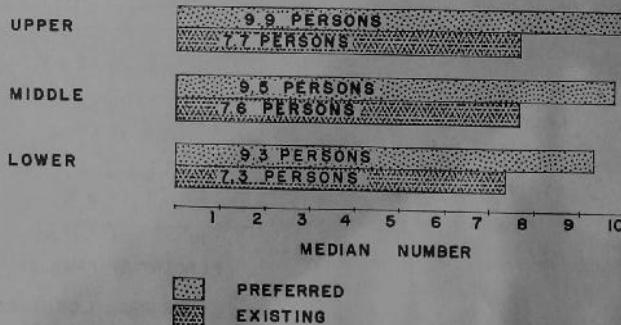


Figure 10. Preferred and existing seating capacity of living room, by economic groups (expressed in median number of persons).

ECONOMIC GROUPS

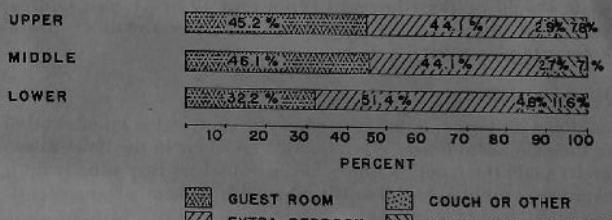


Figure 11. Percentage of families preferring specific accommodations for overnight guests, by economic groups.

time. Families in the upper economic group entertain overnight guests somewhat more often than those in the other two categories.

Families generally express satisfaction with present accommodations for overnight guests. As is indicated in figure 11, most families would prefer to retain either a guest bedroom or an extra bedroom for the convenience of such guests.

Indoor play area for children

Families also are interested in improving their homes from the standpoint of indoor areas for children's play. Almost half believe that their houses should provide a specified play area for children, as opposed to only about 2 per cent who have such areas. (In many houses such space could probably be provided without structural alterations.)

As noted in figure 12, families in the upper economic group place the most stress on play areas for children and those in the lower economic group, the least. Furthermore, the larger the family the greater is the preference for these areas (although it is noted that some families without any children express a desire for these areas).

Two-thirds of all families stating a preference for a play area think that it should be provided on the first floor of the house and preferably

ECONOMIC GROUPS

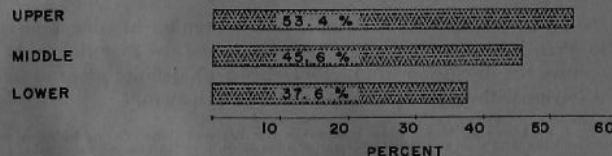


Figure 12. Percentage of families preferring indoor play space for children, by economic groups.

near the kitchen or back door. On an average, families estimate that the space should be the equivalent of an area 10 by 11 feet. Only a small percentage of the families believe that play space should be provided in a separate play room.

Washing clothes

Almost all farm families covered by the study either launder all or most of their clothes at home. When queried on where in the house they would prefer to do the family washing, as against where they usually do it, they expressed considerable dissatisfaction with present arrangements.

As indicated in figure 13, homemakers would like to improve present arrangements primarily by providing suitable facilities in the basement or in a laundry or washroom. About 4 times as many homemakers do their washing in the kitchen in the summer as would prefer to do it here; and for the winter season, the ratio increases to about 4½ to 1. As noted above, relatively few women do their washing in the basement when compared with the percentage that would like to do it there. Apparently the major reason why they are not now using this area is that many of the houses have cellars poorly equipped for such activities.¹⁶

Ironing clothes

As can be seen in figure 14, ironing clothes is another instance in which homemakers would like to move an activity out of their kitchens. A considerable percentage of the homemakers would like to perform this task in a laundry room.

Sewing

Three out of every 4 homemakers mend and make a part of the family clothing. Many of them express a desire for more convenient locations for this work. For instance, about 3 homemakers out of 10 report sewing in the dining room, but only 1 out of 10 would prefer this area. On the other hand, about half the families want a sewing room; now only 1 in 18 has this arrangement.¹⁷ (See figure 15).

Preferences and Plans for Buying Major Items of Equipment

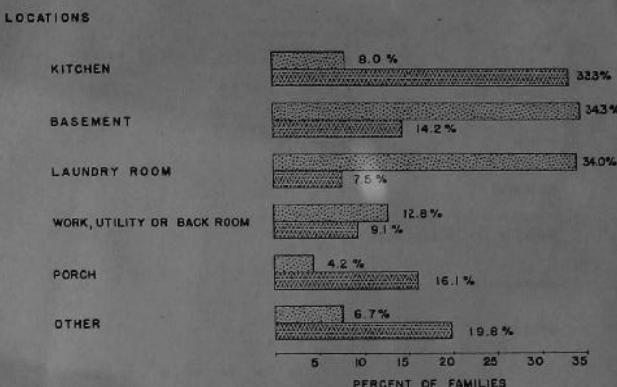
So far in this bulletin the emphasis has been on housing preferences. However, in this section, with the exception of the material on heating facilities, the discussion will be concerned with definite *plans* of families for buying with respect to major items of equipment.¹⁸

¹⁶It is not known specifically where homemakers now dry their clothes during inclement weather, but about one-third wash clothes in the basement; another third, a porch; and one-third, other areas.

¹⁷While a high percentage of homemakers believe that a sewing room is desirable, it should be pointed out that in approaching the problem of planning the whole house, further analysis indicates that they probably would forego such a room in favor of others.

¹⁸Only plans covering the two-year period after the 1948 survey are examined here.

A. SUMMER



B. WINTER

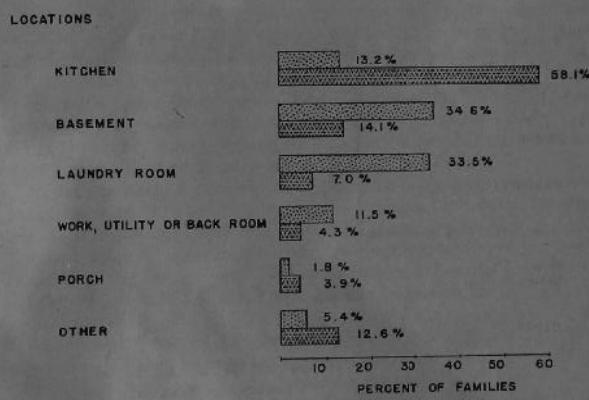


Figure 13. Preferred and existing locations for washing clothes in summer and winter.

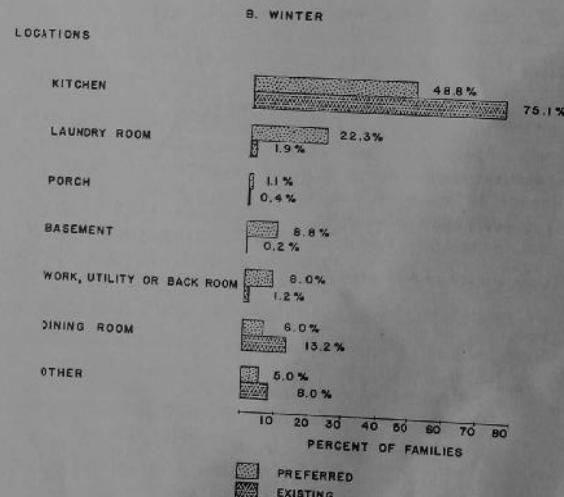
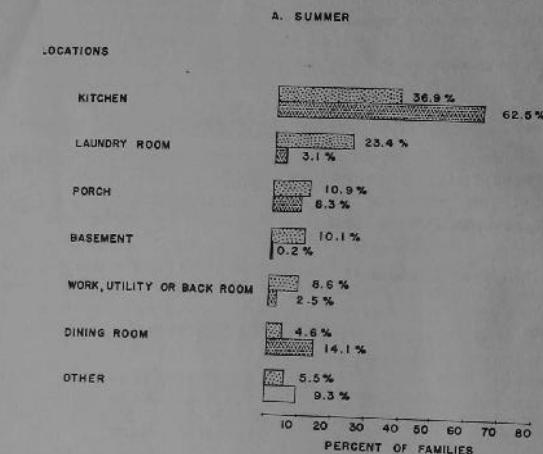


Figure 14. Preferred and existing locations for ironing clothes in summer and winter.

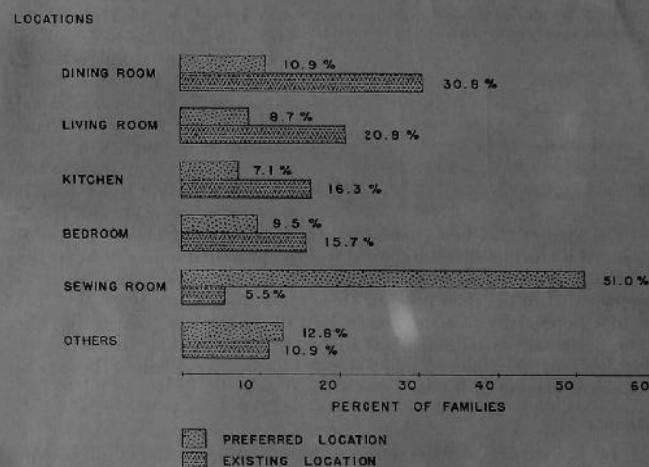


Figure 15. Preferred and existing locations for sewing.

Central heat

Perhaps next to plumbing in importance, the greatest single problem involved in improving farmhouses is the matter of heat. When these old farmhouses were built, heating stoves were the primary source of heat, and insulation was relatively undeveloped. However, if the desires of families for larger living rooms, more livable kitchens, washrooms, back rooms or work rooms, and more indoor play areas for children, can be taken as indexes, many families in the near future will want and need to alter materially their heating systems.

At present only 46 per cent of the families have a furnace, whereas 96 per cent would like to have one. In 53 per cent of the houses, families now use space heaters or other types of stoves. As might be expected, proportionately more families in the upper economic group have furnaces than in either of the other groups. The percentages of families using a furnace for the upper, middle, and lower economic groups are 50, 48, and 33, respectively.

Undoubtedly one of the major reasons why many families prefer a furnace is that they want to heat more rooms than is now possible to heat with their present, less efficient, type of equipment. *Although the median-sized house consists of 7.1 rooms, the median number of rooms heated is only 4.6.* The number of rooms in houses and the number of rooms heated for the three economic groups are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Number of rooms in dwellings and number of rooms heated, by economic groups

Economic group	Median number of rooms	Median number of rooms heated
Upper.....	7.6	4.9
Middle.....	7.2	4.8
Lower.....	6.8	3.8

The kind of fuel being used for heat is undergoing change in the region. At a much earlier date, wood was the principal source of heat; now it is coal. But oil, and to some extent gas, are preferred by a higher percentage of families than now use these kinds. (See figure 16.)

It is noteworthy that more than half of all families want a fireplace. The percentage is largest in the highest income bracket. In the region, fireplaces are not used as a major source of heat. Nevertheless, they are an important symbol of the family as a social unit.

Ranges

The preferences of farm families toward different types of cooking ranges have not been ascertained, but there is evidence that they do not plan to buy, in the immediate future, a type different from the one they now have. Some 57 per cent of all families have a wood and/or coal-burning range, and, furthermore, about half of these families plan to use it indefinitely. Families in the upper economic group are more likely to

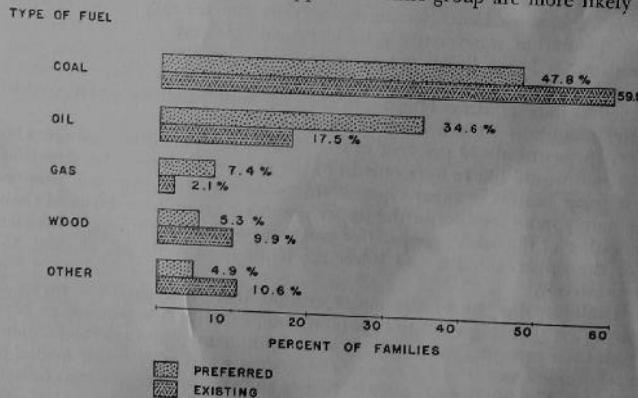


Figure 16. Preferred and existing types of fuel for furnace heat.

change from wood and/or coal ranges to gas or electric ones than are families in the other two economic groups, but the difference is not highly significant.

If central heat were installed, this "old-fashioned" range might become less popular, because it now often serves as an auxiliary space heater. However, even then many families might not change to gas or electric stoves for some time. As previously indicated, proportionately more families in the upper economic group have central heat than those in the other two groups. Therefore, the wood and coal type of range would not be needed so much as an auxiliary heating stove.

It appears that this type of range meets a number of physical and psychological needs; it helps warm the house; homemakers understand its operation and may believe it to be better adapted to long, slow cooking processes than the new type of ranges; to continue with it will not necessitate the heavy outlay of money that would a change to a gas or electric stove; it is unaffected by power failures; and finally, aside from the fireplace, there are few features of the home to which families have stronger sentimental attachments. As long as this type of range continues to be used it hardly needs to be indicated that kitchen planning is an even more complex problem. Not only is there the additional fire hazard, but generally more space is required for the range and the accompanying wood-box.

Laundry equipment

In general, farm families are satisfied with their laundry equipment. (As noted earlier, they are often dissatisfied with the locations for doing the family laundry.) Of course, practically all the families have a washing machine, usually of the electric, nonautomatic type.

Four out of five of the families having this type plan to keep it indefinitely. Some of the reasons why few families plan to change to the automatic type of washer are (1) this type costs more, (2) it makes heavier demands on the rural water supply and sewage system which are often inadequate, and finally, (3) to be satisfactory the house must be equipped with both running hot and cold water.

At present most farm families in this region neither have nor plan to buy an electric ironer. For example, only 7 per cent have an electric ironer, and only 2 per cent more plan to buy one within the next two years.

Approximately one homemaker out of 6 would buy a clothes dryer if she were to buy new laundry equipment.

Refrigeration

Within the next few years farm families will probably make few changes with respect to their refrigeration equipment. Most families now have a mechanical refrigerator; the proportion is smaller among families in the

lower income group. The only implied criticisms families have of their present refrigerators are that many of them are too small.

Although only 16 per cent of the farm families now have a home freezer, (usually of the cabinet type), another 15 per cent plan to purchase one within the near future. The percentage of home freezers among families in the upper economic group is twice as high as among those in the lower economic group; furthermore, three times as many families in the upper economic group plan to buy freezers as in the lower economic group.

Implications

The major housing problem of farm families in the Northeast is one of improving existing dwellings. There is every evidence that farm families, for the most part, will continue to occupy existing houses rather than to build new ones. True, two-thirds of the houses are 60 years old or older, but there is no indication that they will become obsolescent in the immediate future. Furthermore, there is a trend of decrease in rural and an increase in urban population. Therefore, in the Northeast these existing farmhouses will perhaps be more than sufficient in number to house the remaining farm population.¹⁹

Taking, then, the existing inventory of farmhouses and accepting the assumption that the dwellings will continue to be occupied by the present or by other farm families for some years to come, the next important step is to examine these houses. Their most important characteristic, which is related directly to their age, is that they are large. Meanwhile, farm families are becoming smaller; and most of the houses were built to meet the needs of a way of life that has undergone far-reaching changes.

The question arises, then, as to what changes need to be made in the houses to adapt them to today's and tomorrow's living conditions. The problem of analyzing these changes has been approached in this bulletin by studying families' preferences toward the house in general, preferences toward space for performing selected activities, and finally, preferences toward and plans for buying major items of equipment.

The outstanding conclusions with respect to the preferred locations for various activities are summarized below:

Location of activities

Some major satisfactions:

1. *Serving regular meals:* most families serve regular meals in the kitchen and prefer this arrangement to any other.
2. *Serving company meals:* most families prefer their present arrangement of serving company meals in a dining room.

¹⁹There is little to indicate a high rate of new farmhouse construction under this condition. On the other hand, some cognizance should be taken of the point that at least a small proportion of the existing houses may be absorbed by urban people who want a few acres in the country. The movement of nonfarm families to rural areas is a commonplace phenomenon throughout much of the region.

3. *Entertaining guests:* most families are satisfied with the accommodations they now have for entertaining overnight guests. A change is desired in the living room to increase its seating capacity.

4. *Storage space:* apparently the number of rooms in the house is ample (in many houses, perhaps a surplus of one or two rooms), but farm families would prefer to put them to different uses. Furthermore, some of the rooms are not now used at all, except for miscellaneous storage.

Some major dissatisfactions

1. *Food preparation other than for meals:* families evidence a desire to transfer some of these activities from the kitchen to a basement, locker plant, work room, utility or back room, or to some other area.

2. *Laundry work:* families show a desire to do less of their washing and ironing in the kitchen and more in a basement or in a laundry room.

3. *Sewing:* half of the families believe that a sewing room would be the best place in which to do their mending and sewing.

4. *Play of children:* a considerable percentage of families think that a specific indoor area should be provided for the play of children.

5. *Office work:* families are aware of the need of an office or desk space in the house. Of those who want one or the other, the highest percentage of families prefer a desk. The highest percentage prefer it in the living room and the next highest in the dining room.

6. *Place for men to "wash-up":* families have varied opinions as to where this activity should take place; very few, however, think it should be done in the kitchen or regular bathroom.

7. *Additional storage space:* many families show a desire for additional clothes closets and linen closets and for improved storage space for dishes.

The primary conclusions with respect to equipment are summarized below:

Availability and type of major items of equipment

Some major satisfactions

1. *Ranges:* regardless of whether families have an electric, gas, or wood and/or coal range (almost half have the latter), few of them plan to change types within the immediate future.

2. *Laundry equipment:* most farm families now have a nonautomatic electric washer and only an insignificant percentage have a dryer or electric ironer. Little change is likely in this situation in the immediate future, based on present plans of the families.

Some major dissatisfactions

1. *Bathroom:* some forty per cent of the families do not now have a bathroom.

2. *Central heat:* almost all families that do not now have central heat, want it. Until this equipment is installed a sizable amount of living

space in existing houses cannot easily be used in the winter. Often this type of installation, incidentally, is dependent upon improving cellars.

This examination, which is based upon the preferred locations for various activities, reveals that certain areas of the house need to be improved, some could possibly be eliminated, and, in some instances, new types of areas probably should be provided. There is, of course, a considerable difference of opinion among families at different economic levels, families of different sizes and in different stages of the life cycle, and so on. The most obvious conclusions that the foregoing analysis warrants are summarized below:

<i>Areas that need to be improved</i>	<i>Areas probably to be eliminated</i>	<i>New areas probably to be provided</i>
Storage space for clothing	Extra bedrooms	Bathroom; separate place for men to wash-up
Storage space for linen and bedding	Parlor	Utility room, work room or back room
Storage space for dishes	Dining room	Play space for children
Living room		Desk space
Cellar		

Some of the above-suggested spaces or room areas may be controversial, but the analysis in general supports the listing. Most controversial perhaps is the suggested elimination of the dining room, since most families still prefer this area for serving company meals and a low percentage of families prefer it for other activities as well. The elimination of this room could be accomplished only if an adequate and acceptable substitute area for these activities is established.

The equipment in the house is closely related, of course, to the activities carried on there. The major item of equipment that many families want to improve or change is the heating system. Until adequate heat is available for all rooms to be used, complete replanning of these farm-houses is difficult.

It should be reiterated, especially in relation to the above listing, that these conclusions are limited to those based on stated preferences of the families, and, as pointed out early in this bulletin, those preferences can serve only as one of the guides — but an important one — for house planning. Obviously, the stated preferences of families must be supplemented by other guides to the type of housing that will best serve a family's needs. But in the effort of determining the type of housing to be planned, this important guide must not be ignored.

The materials presented above support the conclusion that farm housing in the Northeast is in a stage of transition. Few new houses will be built for farm families in this region. But families have a sufficiently firm opinion of how their houses, built several decades ago, might better serve their present needs to insure that much major house replanning will continue in the future.