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THE RURAL HOUSING SITUATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

David S. Weaver

Head, Division of Agricultural Engineering
North Carolina State College

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(6½ minutes) + (7½)

There are many many problems confronting rural North Carolina, and probably from a long-time viewpoint, the control of soil erosion is second to none. When one considers the future welfare of our state and nation, the housing situation is undoubtedly next. While the condition of a home does not necessarily control the destiny of a future citizen, it undoubtedly has a tremendous effect upon his life and thinking. Not only actual physical discomfort, hazard to health, and safety, are linked with the home, but the psychological effect of poor surroundings on refinement, culture, and poise, are well known.

It has been stated that fully fifty per cent of the farms of North Carolina have buildings, including the residence, which are appraised at less than five hundred dollars per farm. These figures come from the tax appraisal sheets of the various counties, and bring out clearly the deplorable conditions in which a large number of our rural people find themselves. While this ~~deplorable~~ condition is bad enough in itself, perhaps the more tragic aspect is revealed in the fact that often times it is not the economic status of the owner which necessitates the existence of this situation. Proof of this lies in the fact that, in a large number of cases, the automobile owned by the family is actually worth more in cash than the buildings on the farm. When one considers that the automobile must be replaced every four or five years, while the home is usually built to last a generation, and often several generations, one sees the absolute absurdity of the situation. The final solution to this problem, as in all others, is to develop a thinking, thrifty, and intelligent rural population, which under no circumstances would let such conditions prevail.

A rather extensive survey of rural housing conditions was made in this state some few years ago. Some of the conditions discovered are too astounding to be revealed. The percentage of leaky roofs, unstable foundations, sagging floors, dangerous

chimneys, and other such things is exceedingly alarming. To think that human beings spend their days and nights in such ramshackled structures where life itself is in constant danger, not to mention the discomfort ~~to~~ the very young, and the very old, in this sort of an existence, means that something must be done to remedy the situation. The overcrowded conditions due to small homes and ever-enlarging families is another point which was strikingly brought out. The lack of adequate heating and sanitary facilities, and such necessities as good light, was also clearly revealed.

There are many characteristics of the farm home which differentiate it from a city home, and as most architects and home designers have had training only in the designs of urban houses, rural houses suffer from lack of proper design. More recently, persons with farm backgrounds and proper training in design, have been employed to attempt to provide plans which will improve the design of rural homes. Perhaps a brief consideration of the difference in requirements of city and rural homes would lead to a clearer understanding of some of the problems. In the first place, the average farm home not only performs all the functions of the average city home, but in addition it must serve as an office for the farm business, and oftentimes as a factory to process some of the farm products. Rarely is this true of an urban home. These two differences usually mean that the men folks of the rural home, use the house frequently throughout the day, much more so than do those of a city family, therefore, provision must be made for their entrance into the home with a minimum interference with the duties of the housewife. To further emphasize the importance of this matter, the farmer and his son often come in from the field and the barn with their shoes and and clothes in such condition as not to be conducive to cleanliness in the home. Private back entrances to the farm office, or portions of the home, ^{where} the men folks must enter, are therefore, extremely desirable. Regrettable as it may be from an aesthetic standpoint, it is true that the farm housewife undoubtedly spends more time in the working portions of her home, chiefly the kitchen, than does the housekeeper in a city home. This means that in the general design of a house, consideration of this

fact must not be neglected. Let us briefly consider the general problem of the number of rooms, room arrangement, and other related questions in connection with an improved rural home.

In the first place, the home must have enough rooms to accomodate the family. A normal family consisting of parents and children of both sexes must necessarily contain three bedrooms. Some sort of a living room must be provided, and of course a room for the preparation of food. This, of necessity means that five rooms is the very minimum that can be considered satisfactory. We all know of course, of homes of less than five rooms, where the people somehow manage to get along, but the question is raised as to the general level of culture and refinement, together with that of safety, sanitation, and health. As mentioned above, a back entrance must be provided for the men folks, so that they can enter without too much interference with the duties of the housewife and the general cleanliness of the home. A back porch is therefore indicated, and is of great importance in a rural home. The question of the front porch is not so important except from the standpoint of appearance, and social ~~considerations~~ ^{activities}. With the modern ~~consideration~~ ^{conception} of the importance of running water, and sewage disposal, there is no question but that a bathroom is essential. Taking all of the above into consideration, namely, five rooms, plus a bathroom, and the rear porch, it is almost impossible to design such a home without some sort of a passageway or hall to permit access to the various rooms without going through too many other rooms. We now have the elements which must be incorporated into a home. These, coupled with a study of the heating, lighting, and ventilation system, size, number, and location of doors and windows, comprise the problem in design of a satisfactory rural home. Keeping always in mind that the investment must be as low as possible, consistent with good results, the problem of materials of construction, their quality, the shape of the roof, the location of the chimneys, the general arrangements of the grounds involve peculiar and difficult problems.

The North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service has recently added to its staff a man qualified to design rural homes. His work will consist largely of the design of new farm homes, the plans for which will be distributed through the county agents and the home demonstration agents in the various counties. While it will of course be impossible to design homes which will satisfactorily meet the individual needs of every family, it is possible to put out plans which will show the essentials of good construction and design. Where changes are necessary from the standpoint of a particular prospective home builder, that person of course will have to make individual changes. It takes a long time to develop a set of house plans, and consequently this service will not be in full swing the first few years of this man's employment. He will, however, gradually develop these plans and they will become available immediately upon completion.

There is one consideration that should not be overlooked in the matter of materials of construction. North Carolina is particularly blessed with a wide distribution of timber and stone, both of which form important items in the construction of farm homes. Improved methods in the use of these two materials have been developed and every agency is at work to encourage their use. Undoubtedly frame dwellings will be the most popular type of constructions for years to come, and with proper protection with adequate painting, there is no reason why we cannot develop in North Carolina a group of beautiful farm homes, which will not only add to the physical pleasure of living, but promote a sense of well being which will be reflected in the thinking of the people reared in a pleasant environment.

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