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Social Structure and Self-Structure
As They Relate to Off-Farm Employment

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Abstract

Worries about the weather, concerns over market prices, anxiety associated with one's capital situation, and other, almost countless uncertainties are routine for farmers and their families. Taking an off-farm job is a common way that farmers respond to these types of concerns. It is believed that off-farm employment leads to lower identity as a farmer, but it is argued that it is also a consequence of a strong farmer identity. This research explores these claims by focusing on the social structure of farming and one's identity as a farmer, as related to off-farm employment. Off-farm employment was analyzed amid the context of average farm size, grain production, perceptions of markets, type of farming activity, and identification as a farmer. These findings expand our comprehension of off-farm employment, Identity Theory, and contribute to a further appreciation of gender differences in behavioral choices among rural men and women residing in eastern South Dakota.

Introduction

The American farm and the American farmer are today vastly different entities than what they were in years past. In bygone times, the typical farm usually consisted of a relatively small landholding where a wide array of crops and livestock were grown and raised. During this period, the typical farm family most often consisted of a husband (who was usually considered the head of the

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family), and the wife and children (who were often relegated to performing support functions within the family unit). Much has changed, however. For instance, the farm family of the twenty-first century has a more egalitarian division of labor and has adjusted to nonfarm commitments as never before.

The decision to seek off-farm employment has never been a decision that farmers have taken lightly. Numerous factors are taken into account when farmers (and their spouses) make the decision of whether or not to seek off-farm employment. Factors such as the need for additional income, the desire to purchase health insurance, or simply the desire to spend some time away from the farm are some of the reasons why farmers engage in non-farm pursuits.

The strength of farmer's and farm spouse's identities as farmers is thought to weaken when off-farm employment is taken (Lasley 1997). Farmer identity is conceived as a social product, but it is likely that farmer identity is also a social force. As this research will show, ones' perceptions of self ought to be considered as a reason why farmers seek and accept off-farm work. From the perspective of structural symbolic interactionism, people act on the basis of their self-concepts, which are formed and modified as they interact with others (Stryker and Burke 2000). Structural symbolic interactionists focus on self-identities (or role-identities), self-images, and self-feelings (Hewitt 2000). Self-identities are conceptions of self in terms of the social positions one occupies—husband, wife, farmer, employee at a slaughterhouse, and so on. Self-images are adjectives that people use to describe themselves as occupants of social positions—good, bad, competent, incompetent, and so forth. Self-feelings are the sentiments associated with these self-images—pride, shame, et cetera. Some role-identities (called salient identities) are so important to the individual that the individual engages in them more often than other role-identities, regardless of whether or not that identity is whom they truly want to be (called prominent identity). Moreover, expectations of one identity can conflict with the expectations of another identity, forcing one to lower the importance given to either one of the

identities (Stryker 2002); for instance, some farmers have reduced their involvement in community organizations so as to maintain farmer and off-farm employee identities (Sanner 2002). On the other hand, it might be that farmers and their spouses work at a slaughterhouse, or some other off-farm job, in order to maintain the prominent identity of farmer. This research investigates whether or not the role identity of “off-farm employee” is one of these salient identities, and if so, what factors in farmers’ lives (besides the farmer identity) are associated with off-farm employment.

Review of the Literature

The Structural Context of Farming

Farming and ranching have become capital intensive and commercial. A commercial farm produces grains, livestock, and an assortment of other products to be sold off the farm. It is also expected that the sale of these products will produce enough profit to keep the farm in business (Rogers, et al. 1988). Most commercial farms are capital intensive, in that money is needed to purchase or lease land and expensive farm machinery—combines, hay balers, and tractors; customized feeders, crop dryers, and irrigation systems (Rogers, et al. 1988). Farmers without access to capital will fall short of the ideal commercial operation, and will need non-farm income and wealth to supplement the financial shortfall (Bartlett 1986).

Bartlett (1986) argues that remaining on the farm in the face of a marginal commercial position is perceived in three ways. One way is to conceptualize persistence as a rational choice that allows operators to remain on the farm rather than getting out altogether; these operators are seen as transitional farmers who will eventually cease farming. Another is to understand that for some, a farm or ranch is either an investment or a business that has been inherited – it is common for these types of farmers to have full-time jobs and to hire farm labor. Finally, the majority of farmers are “standard part-time farmers,” who are engaged in

farming for the lifestyle. Indeed, Bartlett found that among Dodge County, Georgia farmers, 17% were “transitional” farmers, 17% were investors/inheritors, and 68% were standard part-time farmers. Most of the standard part-time farmers were young adults with full-time jobs who entered farming after graduating from high school or college.

Regardless of the type of farmer/rancher, the number of acres farmed—especially for “grain” farmers—is often an indicator of commercial viability. Data from recent agricultural censuses of the state of South Dakota offer evidence that farms are growing in size and the percentage of farmers with off-farm employment is rising, leading us to believe that there might be a relationship between the two. In 1974, just ten percent of farm operators reported that they worked 200 or more days off of the farm. By 1997, this proportion had risen to over twenty-three percent (USDA 1999). At the same time, the number of South Dakota farms has been decreasing while the size of the state’s farms has been increasing. Since 1964, numbers of farms in the state have declined from almost 50,000 in 1964 to around 30,000 in 1997 (USDA 1999). Concurrently, average farm size in South Dakota jumped from approximately 900 acres in 1964 to over 1,400 acres in 1997 (USDA 1999). Is this covariation of size of farm and off-farm employment spurious, or is there a relationship?

Individual Decision-Making

A number of authors have contributed to the investigation into why farmers work away from the farm. Not surprisingly, the decision to work off of the farm is one that is oftentimes made when economic conditions are somewhat less than ideal (Korb 1999; Mishra and Goodwin, 1997; Hearn, McNamara and Gunter, 1996; Danes and Solheim, 1993; Godwin, Draughn, Little and Marlowe, 1991; Godwin and Marlowe, 1990; Wozniak and Scholl 1990; Acock and Deseran, 1986; Gladwin 1985; Ross 1985; Scholl 1983). Other reasons why farmers and their spouses seek off-farm employment are: the need to earn extra income for

the purchase of farm equipment (Gladwin 1985), the desire for extra money for personal and home use (Wozniak and Scholl, 1990; Naples 1994; Gladwin 1985), the wish to maintain career skills (Korb, 1999; Wozniak and Scholl, 1990; Gladwin, 1985; Scholl, 1983), the desire to make better use of spare time (Wozniak and Scholl 1990), the all too human need for socialization (Korb 1999); Naples, 1994; Wozniak and Scholl, 1990; Gladwin 1985; Scholl 1983), to obtain health insurance (Korb 1999; Gladwin 1985; Scholl 1983), to qualify for social security benefits (Scholl 1983), and to afford “luxuries” such as a vacation (Gladwin 1985).

What else about the farm economy (and farmers' *perceptions* of the business of farming) might lead to off-farm employment? Numerous researchers have noted that, to be successful, farmers must confront many aspects of the farm economy. What are some of the “things” that farmers and their spouses take note of that might lead to off-farm employment? Health of the world agricultural economy and international policies pertaining to imports and exports may be one thing, and the conditions of crops in places as far away as Argentina, Australia, or Russia may be another (Rogers, et al. 1988). American farmers also take note of weather and harvest conditions, as well as nationwide variability of market prices (Altena 1996). Farm families also take special note of local market prices (Wozniak and Scholl 1990), whether or not there are sufficient buyers for his or her farm production, local property taxes (Gladwin 1985), local weather conditions (Wozniak and Scholl 1990), and whether additional land is locally available (and affordable) for purchase or lease (Gladwin 1985). These are the types of issues that most farm families face on a routine basis. In response to these types of issues and concerns, farmers and their spouses may choose any number of “actions.” Farmers might choose to purchase or lease additional land (Gladwin 1985), decrease capital outlays, and identify and lessen unprofitable activities. Another action, which is the focus of this paper, involves working off of the farm.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not farm size, perceptions of the market, type of farming, and the individual's perceptions of self relate to one's involvement in non-farm employment. Of special concern is the extent that these factors are related with one's *identity as a farmer*.

Herbert Blumer, a leading symbolic interactionist, penned the words: "action on the part of the human being consists of taking account of various things that he notes and forging a line of conduct on the basis of how he interprets them" (1968: 15). We can apply Blumer's assertion to farmers' (and farm spouses') off-farm employment. Extending his perspective into the arena of structural symbolic interactionism and identity theory can also enhance this task.⁵

Identity Theory

The central notion found within identity theory is the concept of how one's identity can be used to predict role performances. Identity is a dimension of self. Individuals define themselves as occupying certain social positions – the position as a farmer, for example. Individuals also define themselves in terms of being certain kinds of farmers – rich or poor, efficient or incompetent, and so on. Lastly, they define themselves in terms of self-pride, self-mortification, and other self-feelings. 'Farmer' is a self-description in terms of a position occupied in society; structural symbolic interactionists call this kind of self-description a role-identity because it is "based on enduring, normative, reciprocal relationships with other people ... that give individuals a sense of meaning and purpose in life and should provide behavioral guidance" (Thoits 1991:103-105). Role-identities are seen as both social products and social forces; self-identities are formed and modified through interaction with others, and, once formed, become sources for

⁵ Structural symbolic interactionism diverges from the type of symbolic interactionism most of us are familiar. The two main differences are that it is highly quantitative and it focuses almost exclusively on the formation, maintenance, and consequences of, and changes in, self-conceptions.

goal attainment. Of course, farmers have other role-identities—husband; mother; employee; etc—that also provide a sense of meaning and guide behavior. People more clearly identify, however, with a few of these identities and go to great lengths to sustain and nurture them (Stryker and Burke 2000). The most important or central of these identities are called prominent and salient identities (McCall and Simmons 1978).

Prominent and Salient Identities

Identities can either be prominent or salient. One's *salient* identity is *situational*—this is what the individual does most often (Stryker 2002). In contrast, an individual's *prominent* identity is best thought of as one's "ideal self" (McCall and Simmons 1978: 80). The "ideal self" refers, in this case, to how one visualizes oneself in an ideal situation. For instance, the individual whose salient identity is slaughterhouse worker may idealize himself as a farmer, even though the time spent at the slaughterhouse far exceeds his time on the farm.⁶ One of the reasons why a prominent identity provides a sense of meaning and guides behavior is because one's self-esteem hinges on the successful enactment of that role-identity (Rosenberg 1979; Thoits 1991). Intensive interviews with farm operators support this claim. In general, farmers want to be seen as "good" farmers even if farming is not their primary occupation (Meendering 2001).

In the past, structural symbolic interactionists argued that people prioritize their role-identities and most often enact those that rank the highest (Stryker and Burke 2000; Stets and Burke 2002). These researchers are just now studying how people juggle their role-identities and enact one identity so as to maintain another (Stryker and Burke 2000; Nelson 2001). It is possible that an identity that seems very important is important only because it is the means to sustain one's most prominent identity – this is one focus of this paper. It is

⁶ Of course, the most prominent identity may be the most salient one, which would be less likely the greater the hours spent working off the farm. In either case, identities are socially embedded. Their importance rises or falls within salience and prominence hierarchies in response to the relations farmers have with others.

argued that farmers who operate small acreages, have a smaller percentage of their farm business in the production of grains, have limited access to markets, and who are unhappy with market prices need off-farm employment in order to sustain their most prominent identity-farmer (Nelson 2001). Therefore, both of these identities are important to this paper, since one's salient identity may be used to support one's prominent identity. That is, if an individual's prominent identity is that of *farmer*, but he or she is commercially marginalized, he or she is likely to seek out another avenue – a salient identity (e.g., working off of the farm) – in order to maintain a lifestyle of a family farmer.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The following research hypothesis has been developed to address the research objectives of this paper:

- H₁: There is an inverse correlation between size of farm and the strength of farmer identity.
- H₂: There is a positive correlation between the strength of farmer identity and off-farm employment.
- H₃: There is an inverse correlation between size of farm and off-farm employment.
- H₄: There is an inverse correlation between percent of total effort producing grains and off-farm employment.
- H₅: There is an inverse correlation between perceptions of access to markets and off-farm employment.
- H₆: There is an inverse correlation between perceptions of market prices and off-farm employment.

Research Methods

Characteristics of the Population

The population under scrutiny throughout this dissertation is farm residents living in the Upper Midwest. Specifically, the survey population consists of the accessible portion of rural residents living in eastern South Dakota; this was narrowed down to people living in five eastern South Dakota counties – Beadle, Brookings, Hamlin, Lake, and McCook.⁷ All of the individuals who took part in this study were people who defined themselves as farmers. During data collection, no dollar/crop/or livestock ceilings were specified to delineate “real” farmers from “hobby” farmers. Instead, respondents were simply asked whether or not *they* considered *themselves* to be farmers. The reader is reminded that one person’s hobby farm is another person’s livelihood (Nelson 1993: 5); thus, farmers *themselves* were asked to define their primary occupation.

Sampling Design

Sampling of the population in question consisted of a three-part process. First, preliminary surveys were mailed to households found within rural portions of Beadle, Hamlin and Lake Counties of South Dakota.⁸ After preliminary surveys were completed, those individuals who had replied and had consented to interviews were contacted and interviewed. These respondents were asked to recommend others to be interviewed; some of these additional respondents lived in Brookings and McCook Counties. The express purpose of the interviews was to expand upon information already garnered from the surveys. Finally, follow-up questionnaires were given to individuals who consented to be interviewed.

⁷ It should be noted that the primary emphasis of this study was on Beadle, Hamlin, and Lake Counties.

⁸ Surveys were *not* mailed to residents having a Huron, South Dakota, or a Madison, South Dakota zip code. These areas were omitted in order that a preponderance of data from rural *nonfarm* residents could more easily be avoided.

The original surveys were mailed to 2,030 rural households in Beadle, Hamlin, and Lake Counties. Of the 4,060 surveys (two per address in case there was both a husband and wife) that were mailed, 678 were returned. There were 303 of the returned surveys that were omitted from the study, since these were from individuals who did not consider themselves to be farmers. In addition, 71 surveys were omitted from this particular study as they were from respondents who were over 65 years of age. Respondents over the age of 65 were omitted, since a disproportionate number of people within this age cohort would not likely be working off of the farm. Another 71 were deleted from the analysis because they expected to leave farming within the next five years. Thus, results from 233 surveys were utilized in this study. Of these 233 respondents, 138 were male, and 95 were female. Hypothesis testing was limited to only male farmers. This study also made use of a post interview questionnaire that was administered to interviewees. Forty-one individuals took part in this portion of the study.

Statistical Procedures

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to describe the strength of the association for hypothesis one. Discriminant analysis is used to describe the relationships for the remaining hypotheses. It employs canonical correlation (r_c) as the correlation coefficient. Pearson's r ranges from -1.00 to +1.00, while canonical correlation ranges from 0.00 to +1.00. Both can be squared to determine the amount of variation shared by the independent and dependent variables. Multiple discriminant analysis was used to develop a predictive model of off-farm employment. It employs a multiple canonical correlation coefficient (R_c). Discriminant and multiple discriminant analyses are reverse t -tests, in the sense that the independent variable is measured at the interval or ratio levels and the dependent variable is nominal. Indeed, it is used to predict the percent of cases that fall in each category of the dependent variable using the

independent (predictor) variable; thus the accuracy of the classification can be determined (Kachigan 1986).

Although no random sampling procedures were used, and, therefore, no tests of significance need to be used, probabilities are provided as benchmarks for accepting or rejecting those null hypotheses associated with the above listed research hypotheses. A t-test is used to test hypothesis one. The remaining significance tests employed a chi-square formula used in discriminant analysis. A probability less than .05 is sufficient to reject the null hypothesis and accept the research hypothesis.

Operationalization of Variables

Top three reasons to work off the farm. Respondents were asked, "If you have ever worked off the farm, what is/are the most important reasons for doing so? Please identify the **top three** with "1" being the most important and "3" being the least important." They were given the following eleven items to rank in this way: to supplement my income; enjoyment; extras for myself; extras for my children; for improvements to the farm; for land purchases; employee benefits; my spouse wants me to; extras for my spouse and myself; I am not satisfied being home all the time; and other. A space was provided for them to write in "other" reasons.

Top three reasons for not working off farm. Respondents were asked, "If you do not work off the farm, what is the most important reason. Please identify the **top three** with "1" being the most important and "3" being the least important." They were given the following thirteen items to rank in this way: no time; health of other household members; my children are too young; I need more training or skills; I don't want to; I am retired; poor health; lack of adequate childcare; my spouse does not want me to work; I am looking for work; I am too far from other job possibilities; I lack adequate transportation; and other. They were asked to specify "other" reasons.

Farmer identity. Identification as a farmer refers to how strongly the individual identifies with his or her profession. This variable is an index combining the values for the following four items: “the most important thing for us to do for the future is to expand my/our farming operation;” “farming is more enjoyable than non-farm work;” “there is not any substitute for being able to decide what to do and when to do it as I can as a farmer;” “one of the greatest personal disappointments anyone can have is not being able to be a full time farmer.” These items were drawn from a goal orientation scale developed by Coughenour and Kolowski (1977). Each of these items ranged on a scale of 1 to 6 from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Off-farm work. Off-farm work refers to whether respondents answered yes or no to the following question: Do you work off the farm? The number of hours worked was preferable because it would have allowed regression analysis, but the shape of the distribution was not normal.

Size of farm. The number of acres was measured with an open-ended question: “How many acres do you farm?”

Access to markets and perception of market prices. Access to markets and perception of market prices were measured with the following two items: “How would you describe your access to livestock and/or grain markets?” “How would you describe the price that you receive for your grain and/or livestock?” The response categories for both items were excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, and very poor.

Proportion of effort in growing grains. Operators were asked to “indicate the percent of your effort that goes into the following farm activities.” Growing grains was one of these items.

Analysis of the Data

Off-farm Employment

Farmwomen worked off the farm in greater percentages than farm men. Nearly 59% of women worked off the farm during the winter months, while nearly 55% worked off-farm during the summer months. Conversely, only 33.6% of men worked off-farm during the winter and 29% in the summer.

Reasons For and Against Off-Farm Employment

Farm men and women were asked to rank (in importance) several reasons why they choose to work away from the farm. In addition to the surveys that were mailed to area farmers, forty-one farmer operators were interviewed and were explicitly asked to give their reasons for off-farm employment, and what the income from those jobs provided the farmer's family. With regard to the questionnaire items, farm men, who ever had off-farm employment, ranked "supplement income," "improvements to the farm," and "employee benefits" as the most important reasons for off-farm work (see Table 1).

Table 1. Most often identified reasons for working off of the farm (for males).

Variable	Average Scores	Ranked 1 st	Ranked 2 nd	Ranked 3 rd	Not Ranked
Supplement Income	2.5204	75.5	11.2	3.1	10.2
Enjoyment	.3878	6.1	6.1	8.2	79.6
Extras for myself	.2551	4.1	5.1	3.1	87.8
Extras for my Children	.4796	3.1	13.3	12.2	71.4
Improvement for Farm	.5816	3.1	15.3	18.4	63.3
Land Purchases	.2041	0.0	4.1	12.2	83.7
Employee Benefits	.6429	6.1	20.4	5.1	68.4
Spouse wants me to Work	.0918	1.0	1.0	4.1	93.9
Extra for myself and my spouse	.4388	2.2	6.5	11.6	79.7
Not satisfied being home all the time	.1224	1.0	2.0	5.1	91.8
Other	.3571	8.2	3.1	5.1	83.7
*3 = ranked 1 st ; 2 = ranked 2 nd ; 1 = ranked 3 rd ; 0 = not ranked n = 138					

“Supplement income” was ranked first by 75.5% of farm men and was ranked in the top three by 89.8% of them. “Improvements to the farm” was ranked in the top three by 36.7% and “employee benefits” was ranked as important by 31.6% of them. Males rarely cited “enjoyment” “spouse wants me to work,” and “not being satisfied being home” as important reasons for working off of the farm. Females also ranked “supplement income” and the desire for “employee benefits” very high (see Table 2).

Table 2. Most often identified reasons for working off of the farm (for females).

Variable	Average Scores	Ranked 1 st	Ranked 2 nd	Ranked 3 rd	Not Ranked
Supplement Income	2.0366	52.4	19.5	7.3	20.7
Enjoyment	.5854	12.2	7.3	7.3	73.2
Extras for myself	.1951	3.7	1.2	6.1	89.0
Extras for my Children	.5181	3.6	15.7	9.6	71.0
Improvement for Farm	.2805	1.2	6.1	12.2	80.5
Land Purchases	.0488	0.0	1.2	2.4	96.3
Employee Benefits	1.1707	22.0	22.0	7.3	48.8
Spouse wants me to Work	.1585	1.2	4.9	2.4	91.5
Extra for myself and my spouse	.4878	6.1	7.3	15.9	70.7
Not satisfied being home all the time	.1951	1.2	3.7	8.5	86.6
Other	.2195	4.9	0.0	7.3	87.8
*3 = ranked 1 st ; 2 = ranked 2 nd ; 1 = ranked 3 rd ; 0 = not ranked n = 95					

“Supplement income” was ranked in the top three by 79.3% of women, while “employee benefits” was ranked that important by 51.2% of them. By contrast, however, females also stated that they work for “extras for myself and spouse” (29.3% ranked it in top 3), “extras for their children” (29%), and “enjoyment” (26.8%). Females cited these types of reasons far more frequently than did males who took part in study. Somewhat surprisingly, it was found that both males and females rarely work “because their spouse wants them to” or because they are “not satisfied at home.”

Men cited “no time” (94.5% ranked in top 3), “don’t want to” (70.8%), and “need more training/education” (21.5%) most often as reasons for not working off of the farm (see Table 3).

Table 3. Most often identified reasons for not working off of the farm (for males).

Variable	Average Scores	Ranked 1 st	Ranked 2 nd	Ranked 3 rd	Not Ranked
No Time	2.5055	67.0	22.0	5.5	5.5
Health of other Household member	.0449	0.0	1.1	2.2	96.6
Children too young	.1798	2.2	4.5	2.2	91.0
Need more training/education	.3258	2.2	5.6	14.6	77.5
Do not want to	1.6067	28.1	33.7	9.0	29.2
Retired	.0674	1.1	0.0	3.4	95.5
My poor health	.1011	1.1	2.2	2.2	94.4
Lack of adequate child care	.0562	1.1	0.0	2.2	96.6
Spouse does not want me to	.1236	2.2	2.2	1.1	94.4
Looking for work	.0899	1.1	1.1	3.4	94.4
Jobs too far away	.1573	0.0	3.4	9.0	87.6
Lack of transportation	.0449	0.0	1.1	2.2	96.6
Other	.1910	1.1	2.2	11.2	85.4
*3 = ranked 1 st ; 2 = ranked 2 nd ; 1 = ranked 3 rd ; 0 = not ranked n = 138					

They rarely cited “children are too young” or lack of “adequate childcare.”

Females also cited “no time” (64.7% ranked in top 3), “don’t want to” (50%), and “lack of training/education” (29.2%), but “spouse does not want me to” (43.7%), “children too young” (28.1%), and “other” (28.1%) were also ranked in the top three reasons for avoiding off-farm work (see Table 4).

Table 4. Most often identified reasons for not working off of the farm (for females).

Variable	Average Scores	Ranked 1 st	Ranked 2 nd	Ranked 3 rd	Not Ranked
No Time	1.5882	38.2	17.6	8.8	35.3
Health of the other Household member	.2813	3.1	6.3	6.3	84.0
Children too young	.5625	12.5	3.1	12.5	71.9
Need more training/education	.6875	12.5	6.3	18.5	62.5
Do not want to	1.0000	15.6	18.8	15.6	50.0
Retired	.0000	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
My poor health	.0000	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Lack of adequate child care	.0625	0.0	3.1	0.0	96.9
Spouse does not want me to	.7813	6.3	21.9	15.6	56.3
Looking for work	.0000	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.00
Jobs too far away	.3438	3.1	9.4	6.3	81.3
Lack of transportation	.0000	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.00
Other	.5938	12.5	6.3	9.4	71.9
*3 = ranked 1 st ; 2 = ranked 2 nd ; 1 = ranked 3 rd ; 0 = not ranked n = 95					

The intensive interviews revealed farm families' sentiments that the numbers could not. For instance, a farm wife in McCook County stated point blank: "I don't like leaving my family to have to go to work but ... you have to pay the bills...." Another farm wife added, "I work full time at K-Mart. My job is important for us.... The health benefits are very important." Another responded, "I always felt like I bought the gas and the groceries and I felt good about that." One McCook County farmer made sure we knew his family was still on the farm because of the money his wife brought in.

Money-wise, we probably wouldn't be able to survive in this day and age without the second income. Insurance, that's a big one right there. We have great insurance through her job. She pays for it. Our house in general ... she's probably paid for a majority of it. We have an older farmhouse and its been totally redone, and her income has done that. Her job uses the car ... she pays for the car.... She has a 401K and good benefits there. As far as the wages, yeah, it's our car; it's our house, our furniture. We use a lot of living expenses ... out of

hers. I do the farm payment, the farm insurance, the water, electric, general utilities, that kind of stuff.

But not all farmers work off the farm, and one gave a good reason not to. "I'm fully employed right here [on the farm]," said one farm wife; "maybe over employed."

Tests of Hypotheses

Tests of the hypotheses supported hypotheses one through four but not five and six. Table 5 summarizes these tests.

Table 5. TEST OF HYPOTHESES

HR	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Statistic	Decision
1	Size of farm (acres)	Farmer identity	$r = -.178^*$	Accept
2	Farmer identity	Off-farm employment	$r_c = .244^{**}$	Accept
3	Size of farm (acres)	Off-farm employment	$r_c = .395^{***}$	Accept
4	Grain production	Off-farm employment	$r_c = .290^{***}$	Accept
5	Access to markets	Off-farm employment	$r_c = .073$	Reject
6	Market prices	Off-farm employment	$r_c = .017$	Reject
* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$				

Size of farm is related negatively with farmer identity ($r = -.178$; $p = .042$); however, it is only a weak relationship. As reported in Table 6, there is a significant moderate correlation between farmer identity and off-farm employment ($r_c = .244$; $p = .004$). The average identity score for all farmers was 17.33 ($s = 4.11$). The average identity score for farmers with off-farm employment is 18.70 ($s = 3.88$), while the average for those without off-farm employment was only 16.60 ($s = 4.06$). Nearly sixty-one percent of the cases were classified correctly by the discriminant analysis; however, farmer identity correctly predicted off-farm employment (65.1%) better than no off-farm employment (56.8%).

Table 6. Percent of Cases of Off-Farm Work Predicted Correctly by Farmer Identity

	Work off the farm	Predicted Group Membership		Total
		No	Yes	
Actual Group Membership	no	50 56.8%	38 43.2%	88
	yes	15 31.9%	32 68.1%	47
r _c = .244; X ² = 8.152; p = .004; 60.7% of original grouped cases correctly classified.				

As Table 7 reveals, a moderate significant correlation exists between size of farm and off-farm employment ($r_c = .395$; $p = .0001$). The average size of farms for all operators was 1224.21 acres ($s = 1236.50$). The average size was 1581.92 acres ($s = 1353.22$) for those without off-farm employment, while it was 562.06 acres ($s = 554.12$) for those working off the farm. Over sixty-six percent of the cases were classified correctly by the discriminant analysis. Again, however, farm size was a better predictor of off-farm employment (83.0%) than no off-farm job (57.5%).

Table 7. Percent of Cases of Off-Farm Work Predicted Correctly by Average Farm Size

	Work off the farm	Predicted Group Membership		Total
		No	Yes	
Actual Group Membership	no	50 57.5%	37 42.5%	87
	yes	8 17.0%	39 83.0%	47
r _c = .395; X ² = 22.316; p = .0001; 66.4% of original grouped cases correctly classified.				

As seen in Table 8, a moderate significant correlation was also found for grain production and off-farm employment ($r_c = .290$; $p = .001$). The percent of activity in grain production of farms for all operators was 48.79 ($s = 34.28$). The percent of grain production was 56.06 ($s = 30.66$) for those without off-farm employment, while it was 35.31 ($s = 36.79$) for operators with off-farm employment. The discriminant analysis predicted just over fifty-nine percent of the cases correctly. Again, the independent variable, percent in grain

production, was a better predictor of off-farm employment (62.5%) than no off-farm employment (57.3%).

Table 8. Percent of Cases of Off-Farm Work Predicted Correctly by Proportion of Effort Going into Producing Grains

	Work off the farm	Predicted Group Membership		Total
		No	Yes	
Actual Group Membership	no	51 57.3%	38 42.7%	89
	yes	18 37.5%	30 62.5%	48
R _c = .290; X ² = 11.798; p = .001; 59.1% of original grouped cases correctly classified.				

Multiple Discriminant Analysis

As reported in Table 9, the combination of farm size, farmer identity, and grain production is a good predictor of off-farm employment (R_c = .481; p = .0001). Over 23% (R_c² = 23.14) of the variation in off-farm employment was accounted for by the variation in these three variables. Moreover, over seventy-two percent of the cases were classified correctly by the discriminant analysis. Once again, discriminant analysis correctly predicted off-farm employment (80.4%) better than those without off-farm employment (67.9%).

Table 9. Percent of Cases of Off-Farm Work Predicted Correctly by Acres, Farmer Identity, and Proportion of Effort Going into Producing Grains

	Work off the farm	Predicted Group Membership		Total
		No	Yes	
Actual Group Membership	no	57 67.9%	27 32.1%	84
	yes	9 19.6%	37 80.4%	46
r _c = .481; X ² = 33.333; p = .0001; 72.3% of original grouped cases correctly classified.				

Summary and Conclusions

Many social forces have altered American agriculture. New technologies, commercialization, specialization, capitalization, concentration, intensification, vertical integration, and contract farming have changed farming from the small,

multi-crop and livestock operations that were so typical of early American agriculture, to the large, capital-intensive, mono-cropping enterprises of today (Rogers, et al. 1988). The farm family, too, has undergone radical changes; gender roles have been modified so that now farm wives are often as involved in farm decision-making as their husbands (Meendering 2001), and in some cases they are the primary operator. Something that has not changed, however, is the nearly innumerable list of challenges the farm family faces on a daily basis. Worries about the weather, concerns over market prices, apprehension concerning the question of whether farming will provide enough money to meet day-to-day needs, and other, almost countless vexations, are routine for many farmers and their families. The choice of whether or not to seek off-farm employment is one way farm families address these concerns. The decision to accept a job away from the farm is one that few farmers take lightly (Nelson 2001; Meendering 2001). For one thing, they know that off-farm employment can cause role conflict that leads them to give up conflicting roles; for instance, off-farm employment has been shown to reduce some farmers' involvement in community affairs (Sanner 2002). A goal of this research was to describe the reasons for off-farm employment and to determine if off-farm employment is associated with farm structure—size of farm and percent of effort in grain production—self-identity as a farmer, and perceptions market forces. Another goal was to describe the reasons farmers give for working (or not for working) off the farm.

In this last regard, this study supports findings of the literature. Researchers reported that farmers and their spouses take off-farm employment because they desire extra money for new equipment purchases (Gladwin 1985), personal use (Naples 1994; Wozniak and Scholl, 1990), and for fringe benefits (Korb 1999; Wozniak and Scholl, 1990; Gladwin 1985; Scholl 1983). The results of our study support these claims for both men and women. But our study also

found that, for women, family and personal reasons—extras for my children; extras for myself and my spouse; enjoyment—were also important.

Off-farm positions may well be the enabling agents that allow farmers to retain their farmer identity. Since one's prominent identity refers to how one views oneself in an ideal set of circumstances (McCall and Simmons 1978), it seems logical that an individual who regards himself or herself to be a farmer will seek a number of avenues (including off-farm work) in order to maintain possession of the family farm. The findings of this study appear to support this claim. The analysis of the data, however, reveals that size of farm and percent in grain production are also good predictors of off-farm employment.

Nevertheless, there are some beguiling findings. First, size of farm, farmer identity, and grain production were better predictors of employment off the farm than they were as predictors of no off-farm employment. The reason why this is the case may be that farmers without off-farm employment are far more diverse in their farm operations and farmer identity than are those who hold off-farm employment. Second, like farm men, farm women identified "supplement income," "improvements for the farm," and "employee benefits" as reasons for choosing to work off the farm⁹. Third, the cross-sectional design used in this study does not allow us to conclude that the higher farmer identity for those with off-farm employment is the cause or the consequence of off-farm employment. Certainly, identity theory hypothesizes that it is a causal agent, but researchers using a time series research design would be better positioned to draw conclusions. Fourth, perceptions of farmers' access of markets and market prices were not significantly related with off-farm employment. The failure of identity theory to account for perceptions of the market may be due to the more

⁹ It may be worth noting that of the three main reasons for seeking off farm employment, "employee benefits" was the only predictor that was ranked among the top three by *both* females and males. Moreover, a greater percentage of women ranked "extras for my children," "extras for myself and my spouse," and "enjoyment" in the top three reasons for accepting off farm employment (it may be that parent and spouse identities are more prominent than farmer identity for the women who took part in this study).

ever-present nature of commercialism. Their more marginal commercial situation, as measured by size of farm, may make these farmers' perceptions less important considerations for those seeking off-farm employment. Future research, however, should explore this proposition with regard to commercial farmers. The other propositions need to be tested in more detail as well, preferably with a time series research design using a probability sample.

Practical Implications

Every year, the proportion of farmers to urban dwellers becomes smaller and smaller. The growing trend toward corporate farms, as well as the continuing migration of rural folk to urban areas is resulting in the vanishing of a way of life. Only by studying the rural farm population *now* may we capture the spirit of a people that are disappearing from our demographic landscape. In addition, this research showed that many farmers have the desire (and the need) to obtain off-farm work. Policy makers, economic developers, and local officials may be able to use this information to further the availability of off-farm employment. In addition, company managers and personnel administrators would be wise to heed the unique needs of employees who live on the farm. For example, a farmer near Ramona, South Dakota recounted his working 12-hour shifts, and how scheduling his livestock marketing was sometimes problematic. Although his employer was supportive of his need for time off, it should be noted that most (if not all) companies who employ farmers on a seasonal or year-round basis need to be specially aware of the fact that for many farmers, the job in town is a *second* job, and will always likely come second to the farmer's concerns back home.

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