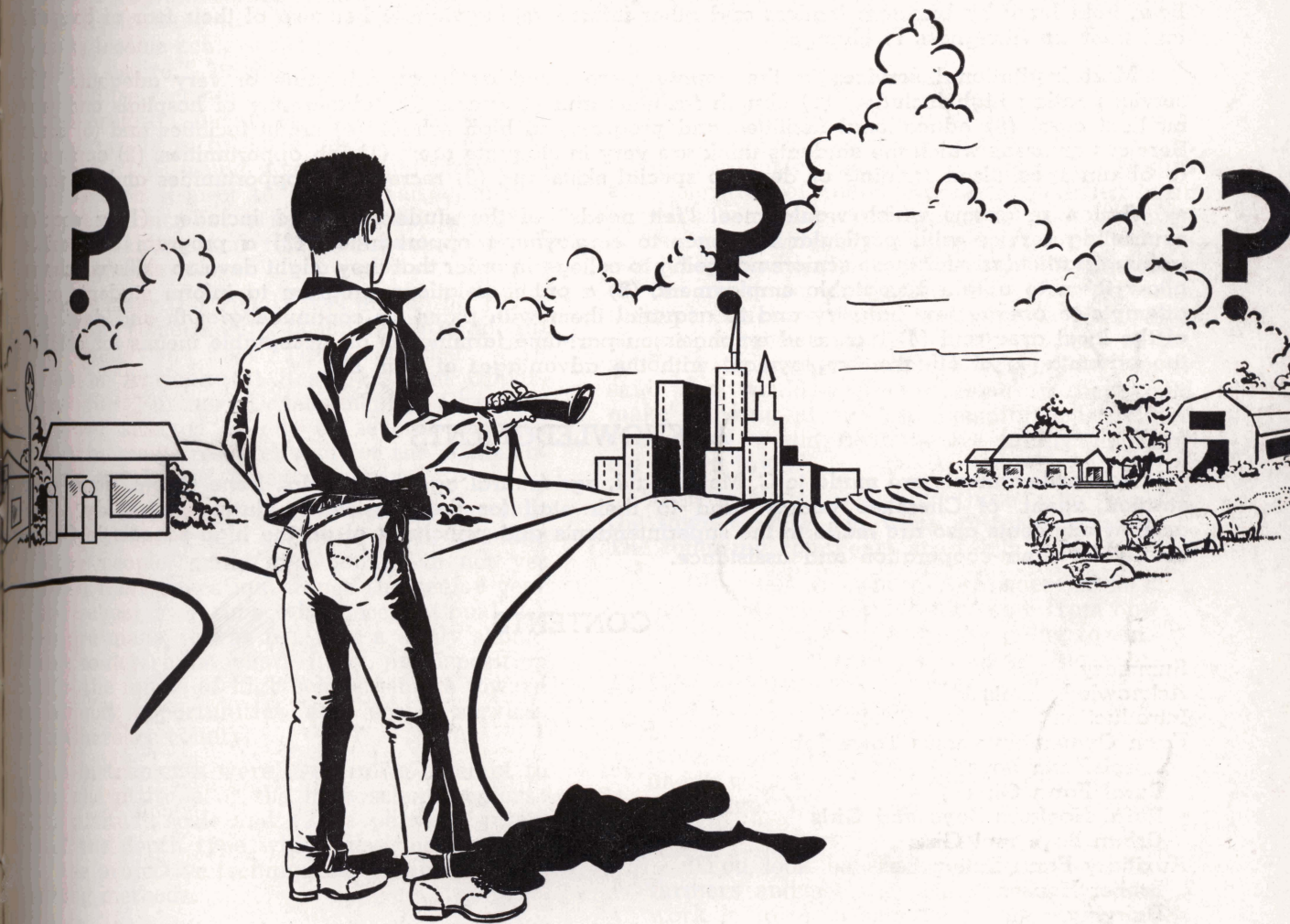


Attitudes of Youth toward Occupational Opportunities and Social Services in Cherokee County

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SUMMARY

This study was conducted by the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station in 1956 to determine the attitude of high school seniors toward occupational opportunities and social services in Cherokee county. All of the white senior boys and girls in the county (234) were interviewed between January 3 and June 1, 1956. This particular study is one phase of a broad research project entitled: "An Analysis of Agricultural Resources and Opportunities for Further Development."

Senior boys in Cherokee county prefer an average job in a town or city to ownership and operation of their own farm. Senior girls prefer that their future husband hold an average job in town rather than own and operate a farm.

Most of the seniors prefer to live and work in Cherokee county, but do not believe acceptable employment will be available in the county. They, therefore, feel that they will have to leave the county.

From the standpoint of personal opportunity, the students are not interested in farming in general, broiler production, dairying, pulpwood cutting or sawmill work, which are the predominant agricultural jobs available in the county.

A general attitude held rather firmly by a large number of students is that industrial expansion has been held back by business leaders and other influential individuals because of their fear of competition and their unwillingness to change.

Most institutional services in the county were rated as being adequate or very adequate. Those services rating high include: (1) church facilities and programs, (2) availability of hospitals and general medical care, (3) educational facilities and programs in high school, (4) credit facilities and (5) housing. Services or areas which the students think are very inadequate are: (1) job opportunities, (2) opportunities to obtain specialized training or develop special skills and (3) recreational opportunities and programs.

Action programs which would meet "felt needs" of the students should include: (1) a vocational counseling service with particular reference to employment opportunities, (2) a program of specialized training particularly for those seniors not going to college in order that they might develop skills which would allow them to obtain acceptable employment, (3) a public relations program to inform students of local attempts to obtain new industry and to acquaint them with plans for continued growth and development of the local area and (4) increased emphasis on part-time farming as an acceptable means for combining the advantages of off-farm employment with the advantages of farm life.

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Attitudes of Youth toward Occupational Opportunities and Social Services in Cherokee County

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IN HIS 1955 MESSAGE TO CONGRESS, the President stated: "In this wealthiest of nations where per capita income is the highest in the world, more than one-fourth of the families who live on American farms still have cash incomes of less than \$1,000 per year."¹ Included in the President's message was a 15-point program recommended by the Secretary of Agriculture to "help farm people with low gross income achieve the goals to which they themselves aspire." In this report, the Secretary of Agriculture recommended that a state-federal research program should be undertaken to canvass the problems of such areas and explore approaches. This would give a factual picture of the needs with respect to farming adjustments, local opportunities for off-farm work, improved vocational training and related aspects in community improvement.

Shortly after this report was made, the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station initiated an intensive study in East Texas entitled: "An Analysis of Agricultural Resources and Opportunities for Further Development." Cherokee county was selected as one of several counties for more intensive research and for the establishment of a rural development program.

The Secretary's report also pointed out that the principal changes in such areas will be made by young people, many of whom have not yet completed their education. Since the senior year in high school is a time when occupational decisions are made, it was felt that a study should be made to determine what, if any, predisposition exists in the minds of high school seniors toward occupational opportunities and social services within Cherokee county.

Two instruments were used in an attempt to discern the attitude of the high school seniors: (1) an attitude scale and (2) a personal interview of the depth type which also included the use of the projective technique and various other counseling methods.

All of the white senior boys and girls in Cherokee county (234) were interviewed between January 3 and June 1, 1956. Seventy-eight were classified as rural farm, 72 as rural nonfarm and 84 as urban dwellers. There were 127 males and 107 females.

FARM OWNERSHIP VERSUS TOWN JOB

Senior boys were asked the following question: "If you were ready to begin your life's work and had a choice of the following two situations, which would you choose: (1) an average job in a town or city or (2) to own and operate your own farm?" Girls were asked which of these two jobs would they prefer their future husband to select if he had to make a choice between the alternatives mentioned.

Rural Farm Boys

Of the 47 boys who live on farms, 32 indicated their preference for the average job in town. Ten out of the 15 who selected ownership and operation of their own farm qualified their answers by adding other considerations. Seven of these 10 said they would farm only if they could begin with the right set-up. Explanations of the right set-up varied, but included such things as tractors, other machinery, large acreage of land, sizable herds of purebred beef cattle, grade A dairies or broiler houses. Two others said they would prefer to farm if they could make a living at it. The remaining individual stated: "I would farm before taking just any old job in town."

Justifications given by those who selected the town or city job were uniform in content. The following comments are fairly typical:

"It's got to where a farmer doesn't have a chance. He doesn't know from one day to the next whether he's going to eat. A storm may ruin his crops. One year tomatoes may bring 2 cents and the next year 4 cents. Farming is plenty hard work but I don't mind that. Lately we just haven't got our money back. That's why daddy went to work at the state hospital 2 years ago. We just couldn't make a living farming."

"You look back at your father or at farmers and see they can't make it. We work in town to buy the farm. What we make didn't come out of the ground. Only 1 farmer out of 50 in Cherokee county gets his living out of the ground. Most of the people who farm are on this veteran's program. Half of the ones I know farming draw money that way. _____'s father is the only one I know who makes his living from the farm."

"Farming is just not any good any more. No one is trying to do anything

¹"Development of Agriculture's Human Resources," House Document No. 149, Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1955, p. III.

for the farmer. Some of our farmers were allotted 1/10 of an acre. Bankers, barbers, lawyers get into anything that's making money. If they lose, they can write off their losses. Farmers can't. Take the broiler business. When it was real good, one man put up 10 houses. That type of thing just brings the price down and nobody makes any money."

The essential ideas found in the following two statements were expressed by nearly all of the boys interviewed: "There's no future in farming; also, you've got to have a mighty big set-up." "It's just a living anywhere you go, but you can't get that on the farm."

Rural Farm Girls

Only 2 of the 31 girls who live on farms prefer that their husband farm. One of these wants her husband to be a big ranchman while the other wants her husband to farm "even though I know you can't make anything on one." Reasons given by the 29 girls selecting the average job in town for their future husband are similar to those that follow: "Farmers around here are poor." "Work in town is not as hard." "I don't want to be a farmer's wife." "Farmers never have anything" and "farmers are in the lower class."

Rural Nonfarm Boys and Girls

Among the 72 rural nonfarm boys and girls, only 4 indicated a preference for farming. Even these 4 added significant qualifications to their selection. Short excerpts from the explanations of the 68 who selected an average job in town are: "Farming is living from hand to mouth." "Farming is too uncertain." "Equipment is too high and prices too low." "Farming is not as promising as other things." "Most of us plan to go to college. After college most people do something else."

Urban Boys and Girls

Only 4 out of 84 urban seniors selected ownership and operation of a farm. The following comment made by an urban senior boy reflects the attitude of almost all of his fellow students: "You don't get enough money for it. It's really just a gamble. If a storm wrecks your crop, you're in the hole. Riding a tractor all day doesn't appeal to me. So many people are losing money. Young people want to get out and make some money and you sure can't make it on a farm."

AUXILIARY FARM ENTERPRISES

Broiler Houses

One enterprise that has developed rapidly in many areas of the South during the past 10 years is broiler production. On a number of farms in Cherokee county, broiler growing is an auxiliary enterprise. During a discussion of the operation of broiler houses in Cherokee county, 21 of the 47 farm boys indicated that they think broiler

production has helped the farmers and the county as a whole. Nine of the boys displayed a negative attitude while the 17 remaining ones were either neutral or uncertain.

The following comments are typical of those favoring the broiler industry: "It's a good business. Most people who have them are making a good living from them. The main drawback is the expense to get set up so they can make a good living." "My grandfather has 10,000 broilers. It has its ups and downs, but you can make money at it."

The following is an example of the negative comments: "There isn't much opportunity because there are so many in it. If you make a living, you've got to have a job besides that. Very few people have enough time to tend to them." Another stated: "Some people are holding back because they are scared there are going to be too many. Price hasn't been above 25 cents in a long time."

Of the 30 boys who have strong favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward broiler production, 28 indicated that they do not believe farmers would be building more broiler houses unless the situation changed drastically. Reasons given for this belief are: (1) price varies too much, (2) price is too low, (3) too big a risk and (4) lack of money or credit. One of the 2 boys who think broiler production is expanding in the county put it in these words: "More people are building houses every day."

A general attitude held by all except 6 of the students interviewed, is that, although the broiler industry has been helpful in past years, it offers little permanent hope to farm people. The students feel that whenever it becomes apparent that a reasonable profit could be made on broilers, businessmen and other town people would put in so many houses that the result would be such low prices that no one would make a profit. None of the students thinks of the broiler business as representing an occupational opportunity for him personally.

Dairying

An analysis of the attitudes toward dairy farming reveals that among the 47 farm boys, 28 hold favorable or very favorable attitudes. Five hold negative attitudes, and 14 are either neutral or indicated they have no knowledge or attitude concerning dairying. One individual stated: "Dairying is a good enterprise to go into. There's considerable interest in it in this county. It's expensive. A grade A barn and a lot of equipment costs you a whole lot. It takes a long time to come out where you will show a profit." Still another stated: "I like the dairy business. I've been thinking about it. We have seven heifers. We sell at South Texas Producer's Association. The money problem is the main drawback. It takes so much to get started." Another said: "It's the only job in this county on the farm that is paying off."

The few negative comments are based either on the big investment required or that it is a 24-hour job. The following statement reveals one of the student's thoughts: "I heard some people say that dairy farmers were the ones making the money. That is wrong. Dairy farmers aren't doing all right, *definitely*. I don't think they get a fair deal. Sometimes 'they' will cut the price of milk. They should set a decent price and leave it. It takes an awful lot of money to start and it sure takes an awful long time to pay out."

The students as a whole indicated a very strong negative reaction toward the idea of their borrowing money to go into dairying or broiler production. Their thinking is that the returns are too little and too uncertain for the risks involved. Borrowing money and taking a chance are concepts which seem to have essentially the same meaning to the students. It seems clear to the interviewer that most students are strongly determined not to become burdened with debts or other long-term involvements with the exception of a car, home and furniture.

Pulpwood Cutting and Sawmill Work

The students have a strong negative attitude toward pulpwood cutting and sawmill work. They are not favorable to either job as supplementary work or as full-time employment. Of the 47 rural farm boys, 33 gave strong reasons why they would not consider work of that type. Two boys said it was hard work, but you could make good money cutting paperwood if you had a power saw. The remaining 12 indicated that they are not familiar enough with either job to know how they would like the work. The following statements are revealing: "There wouldn't be one in the whole school who would want to. It's a job for a——— as far as I'm concerned. When a person can go to college and become specialized, he's got no business sawing logs or cutting paperwood. I don't mean necessarily an easy job, but something that's got a future to it." "Boys in my class wouldn't cut paperwood or work in sawmills. It's just the idea of being a woodcutter. Most people say, 'I'd never be a woodcutter'."

Industry

Nearly every student indicated that industrial development will determine whether the county grows. This illustrates further their lack of faith in the future of agriculture in the area. Reasons given as to why industry has not developed more rapidly vary widely. However, approximately half of the responses fall into three categories. Some 44 students feel that city councils and other business people have blocked industrial development. Thirty-five students think the lack of adequate water is the main factor affecting industrial expansion. Some 15 students think that necessary changes and developments are blocked because too many people are set in their ways and are unwilling to change.

The following comments are illustrative of the thinking of the students: "———people

are afraid they will become little fish in a big pond and they would rather be big fish in a little pond." "We just have a plain old clannish town. The people that have control in this town are living for themselves. Industry hasn't had a chance to come in here." "Some of the people in ———are prejudiced against anything new coming in. They don't want to lose anything. They fear competition from bigger companies that would come in if things were growing faster." "A few men in ———hold all the business. 'They' are pretty wealthy and keep other businesses and factories out. One man on the city council tried to get things moving. They told him to shut up. He said there wasn't much point in trying to express your views. They would rule you down every time."

"City council has been keeping a lot of them out. Last year a hat factory wanted to come in, but the city council kept them out. There are a lot of old timers who control the town and school board and don't want the town to change. When a store comes in, they have to sign an agreement not to undersell other stores. You pay higher prices here than in other towns."

These statements and many other similar ones certainly reveal that large numbers of the senior students have little appreciation for the adult business and industrial leaders in the county. Such comments would suggest the need for some type of public relations program aimed at high school students.

EMPLOYMENT HERE VERSUS ELSEWHERE

Rural Farm Boys

When the 47 farm boys were asked if they prefer employment in their home county to employment elsewhere, 30 answered their home county. Some 16 prefer work elsewhere while 1 is undecided. Explanations by those who prefer work in their home county reveal the presence of a serious dilemma in their thoughts. This is revealed in the following statement: "I'd rather stay here than any place on earth if work were available, but we just don't have it here. It has everything I would like except opportunity or work."

The students were asked: "Do you think the chances of your working in your home county as an adult are greater than they are for working elsewhere?" Only 6 of the 47 farm boys think the chances are greater for their working in their home county, as contrasted with 32 who think elsewhere and 9 who are undecided. In their explanations, the great majority stated that they know of no better place to live, that they like the people, it is their home and they would like to remain there, but . . .! The following comments reveal the transition in the students' thinking: "Jobs here pay less than any county in the State." "There aren't many jobs and there are better living conditions and better jobs elsewhere."

"There's just nothing to do. Only one industry and it pays low wages." "Most boys and girls are looking for something easy. You get ahead faster in the city." "There are no job openings! Everything is moving out. Three stores closed recently." "Most people leave here to get a better job even though they prefer to be here."

Rural Farm Girls

The attitude of the rural farm girls does not differ materially from that of the boys. Out of a total of 31 farm girls interviewed, 21 prefer to work in their home county. Seven expressed a preference for employment elsewhere and 3 are undecided. When asked where they think the chances are greatest of their being employed, 9 answered the home county, 9 elsewhere and 13 are undecided. However, as the interview progressed, every girl expressed the belief that better jobs could be obtained elsewhere. Three-fourths of the girls also indicated that there are no acceptable jobs available in their home county. One after another commented: "There's just nothing to do around here." Almost as common was: "If you don't want to farm, there is nothing to do."

Urban Seniors

The urban boys and girls are more critical of the employment situation than are the rural farm or rural nonfarm youngsters. Of a total of 84, slightly more than half (43) stated that they would prefer to work elsewhere. When asked where they thought the chances were greatest of their working as adults, 80 percent said elsewhere. Typical comments are: "There are better opportunities and better pay elsewhere." "Just not any new developments or opportunities around here." A senior girl concluded her remarks with the following emphatic statement: "Students here have more ambition than these jobs take."

SCHOOL PROGRAM

When asked to rate the educational facilities and programs of the high school they were attending, 132 out of a total of 234 (56.4 percent) gave their school a score of 4 out of a possible score of 5. A score of 4 meant that they consider the program and facilities are *adequate*. Some 62 seniors consider facilities and programs are *inadequate*. Only 7 feel they are *very inadequate* while 18 think they are *very adequate*.

In their explanations of their ratings, most of those who rated the school as being adequate or very adequate pointed out weaknesses in the school which they would like to see corrected. Those rating the school as inadequate pointed out the same weaknesses and indicated that they accounted for their rating. In the first group, overall satisfaction was strong enough that, regardless of the student's recognition of weaknesses, he still rates the school high. Those with less overall satisfaction tended to base their judgment more on recognized weaknesses.

The primary weakness cited by better than 75 percent of the seniors is the lack of course offerings. The following statements are fairly typical:

"We don't get as wide a field of study as we should have. I couldn't get chemistry. We don't have any mechanical training. In fact, the only vocational thing we have is agriculture."

"We don't have enough courses in high school. I'd like to have had home economics, drama or speech."

"Those who are going to college need other courses in high school."

"We need more specialized courses like chemistry, physics and other types of courses."

"I guess maybe we need some consolidation of schools so we could get better training for college. We need things like Latin, chemistry, trigonometry and solid geometry. I almost forgot mechanical drawing. Then we've got a few boys who don't want to go to college or don't have the money. There ought to be some shop courses for those who can't go to college."

A significant number of youngsters in one or two schools referred to the poor quality of teaching. Typical comments are:

"Teachers here have just been here too long and are so set in their ways that they don't get the job done."

"The teachers are too lenient on requiring students to study. A student can make good grades without really doing his best work."

"When most of the kids go off to college they don't do too well. Several flunked out of Texas, A&M and other colleges. I went through elementary and high school and I've seen few parents visit this school. The only time the principal comes in is when he has something to ask or tell the teachers. Most of the kids pass their English. Their biggest trouble is with their math.—— usually teach math and they aren't qualified. I wish there was a law against their teaching important courses like math.—— is taught by—— teacher.—— is also taught by this same teacher. Nobody could get much out of his classes."

The school receiving the highest rating, both on the rating scale and the students' explanations, has surprising characteristics. One of the seniors expressed it this way: "This school doesn't have everything it should, but what is offered is good. When you get out of a course here, you've got something. It comes down from the principal. If you get out of line he can get plenty rough. Some folks might call him old-fashioned, but I'll

bet none of the seniors would. Why he'll dress you down one day, but the next day if you want to do something in connection with the school he'll back you up. He makes you feel like you can do most anything, but look out if you 'fluff off' and don't try. He treats the girls just like the boys, too."

The school receiving the lowest rating is one where the pupils feel the teachers are too lenient and that the principal has little knowledge of what goes on within the classrooms. Undoubtedly, the students' strong appreciation of higher education as a vehicle for obtaining acceptable employment plays a large part in determining their attitude toward the school.

4-H Club and Vocational Agriculture

Although 4-H Club work is not officially a part of the school program, it is included here since it was considered with vocational agriculture in the interviews.

Of the 47 farm boys, 25 had participated in 4-H Club work for an average of 3.2 years. Only 4 out of the 47 had not participated in FFA work. The 43 participants had participated for an average of 2.6 years. Only 6 out of 43 boys conducting projects experienced a loss on them, while 12 broke even and 25 made a profit.

The boys were asked to indicate by a scale score how their experiences in 4-H Club and FFA had affected their attitude toward farming as a vocation.

Answers of the 47 boys were:

No answer	12
Very favorable toward farming as a vocation	2
Favorable toward farming as a vocation	11
Undecided about farming as a vocation	13
Unfavorable toward farming as a vocation	6
Very unfavorable toward farming as a vocation	3

As the interviews proceeded, it became clear to the interviewer that this scale was meaningless because some of the boys answered in terms of their attitude toward the 4-H Club and FFA programs, while others answered in terms of their attitude toward farming as a vocation. The following comment reveals how the students generally reacted: "I didn't make any money on my projects in 4-H. I raised chickens in FFA but we ate them at home. FFA didn't have anything to do with the way I feel. I just don't like farming. It helps you if you do want to be a farmer."

In general, the students revealed strong favorable reactions toward the 4-H Club and vocational agriculture programs. Most of the comments

are similar to the following: "I learned about diseases of animals, insects that hurt crops, parliamentary procedure and leadership." "I learned about farm management and how to do things for myself."

Examples of negative comments are: "I received very little benefit from carrying out 4-H or FFA projects. I learned how to make rope and bud trees. I already knew most of it." "It was fun and you did learn something about farming but not much. The teacher didn't seem to know too much about FFA and the program was not too big."

Regardless of their personal feelings toward the program, the boys and girls expressed a strong opinion that vocational agriculture should include more shop or industrial training, such as welding, plumbing and carpentry, or that separate industrial education courses should be established. These statements or questions were generally prefaced by the following clause: "Since none of us plan to farm, why don't they teach welding, cabinet work and mechanical training?"

GOALS OF STUDENTS

It became apparent to the interviewer that most of the youngsters set high consumption standards for themselves. And the economic factor seemed to dominate in most decisions or definitions of situations which they made.

Ideas expressed in the interviews and scale scores reveal three general areas which the students feel are very inadequate in their home county. These are: (1) job opportunities, (2) opportunities to obtain specialized training or develop special skills and (3) recreational opportunities and programs.

Most institutional services and facilities, however, were rated as being adequate or very adequate. Among these are such things as: (1) church facilities and programs, (2) availability of hospitals and general medical care, (3) educational facilities and program in high school, (4) credit facilities and (5) housing.

In spite of their attitude toward these services, one after another emphasized that most of the people living in the county are not making progress, and that more than anything else the students do not want to "get in a rut." When talking about the type of work they would like, the students mentioned such things as high pay, easy work, retirement plan, hospital benefits and tenure. One young man, though somewhat unique in his method of expression, stated what seemed to be something of a consensus for the group: "I want to get a job that will pay me the most money the quickest."

In the discussions of their future life, more than two-thirds of the students brought out that modern homes, furnishings, automobiles and other modern conveniences make a good income

a necessity. They also are aware of their need for specialized training to command such a salary. When the 47 farm boys were asked if they plan to go to college, 24 said "yes," 19 "no" and 4 are undecided. Of the 19 saying "no," 12 said they plan to take some type of specialized training. Specific training mentioned included: printing, mechanical, tile setting, welding and pipe fitting. Of the 7 who answered "no" to both college and specialized training, 5 indicated that they had good jobs awaiting them. These jobs are ones they had held during previous summers and include roughnecking, pipelining, cement finishing and factory work.

When questioned about their plans for college, 34 of the 46 urban boys said they plan to attend, 9 do not and 3 are undecided. Of the 9 who do not plan to go to college, 7 stated that they plan to take some specialized training.

The primary training which the girls plan to take after high school is secretarial training or nurses training. Secretarial training is of paramount interest because most of the girls had one or more years of typing in high school. They also think that secretarial positions could be obtained readily in Tyler, Dallas and Houston. The cost of training seems to be the primary deterrent for those interested in nursing.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS

Some proof of the reliability of judgment and the overall attitudes of the rural farm seniors is revealed by the actual farm income plight of their parents. For example, only half of the parents consider farming to be their major job. Of those parents who do consider farming as their major job, better than half have supplementary jobs in addition to farming. Approximately one-third of the mothers are employed at regular jobs away from the farm. Half of the rural nonfarm mothers have regular employment. Still a higher proportion of the urban mothers (52 out of 84) have regular jobs. The role which parents play in the formation of the attitudes of the seniors may be observed in the following comments:

"Young people have seen their fathers work so hard and not get anything out of it. My father has told me and my little brother not to ever try farming. After you work months on a crop and have to give it away, there's not much reward. As for other jobs, there is nothing here to keep us. We have pretty big ambitions now. Maybe in a year or two we will come back with our ears down. There is no chance for advancement here. A secretary stays a secretary and the boys can't get financed around here. They can go to college, but they don't come back."

Out of a total of 78 fathers of rural farm youngsters, 62 fathers are farm owners. Average acreage owned by these farm owners is 114, while average acreage devoted to crops is 13.0. Of the 78 farm youngsters, 52.5 percent indicated that their families produce some meat for home consumption. Slightly more (58.9) indicated that they have a farm flock of chickens. Slightly less (51.3) indicated that they have a milk cow. Nearly all the comments which students made concerning these three activities are of a negative nature. There was a tendency to associate a garden and milk cow with a small farm for which the students have little or no appreciation.

Every farm and urban boy had a part-time job during his senior year. Only two of the rural nonfarm boys did not have a job. Earnings during the school year up to the time of the interview averaged \$474.40 for the rural farm boys, \$518.50 for the rural nonfarm boys and \$601.62 for the urban boys. Only 11 of the 47 farm boys indicated that they had done farm work for pay during their senior year.

IMPLICATIONS

Both the attitude scale and the personal interviews reveal a very favorable attitude on the part of the students toward rural life and most institutional services provided by the local area. But the students hold unfavorable attitudes toward farming and other alternative occupations available in the local area.

Although agriculture is playing more and more of a minor role in the total economy, industrial development has not proceeded rapidly enough to fill the gap. The primary employment available to Cherokee county youths is in jobs such as grocery store clerk, filling station attendant or one-dollar-per-hour factory work.

With high goals rather firmly established, these students recognize that their aims cannot be reached through these jobs or by farming. Consequently, migration out of the local area appears to them to be the only acceptable solution.

Action programs that would be accepted by these youngsters should concentrate on several aspects of the problem: (1) a counseling service with particular reference to employment opportunity; (2) training particularly for those seniors not going to college to develop special skills which would enable them to obtain employment regarded as acceptable by them; (3) a public relations program to inform students of local attempts to attract industry and acquaint them with plans for continued growth and development of the local area; and (4) increased emphasis on part-time farming as an acceptable means for combining the advantages of off-farm employment with the advantages of farm life.