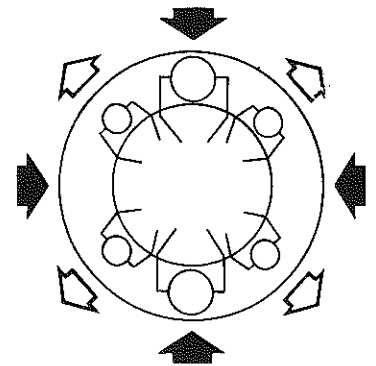


HOW FARM FAMILIES MAKE DECISIONS



**An interdisciplinary project: Departments of
Rural Sociology, Agricultural Economics,
and Manuscripts and University Archives.
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 14853**

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THE CROCKERS

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Family No. 6

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INTRODUCTION

Cornell University has a long-standing record of working closely with farm families. Early professors of agriculture took their classes to visit farms. In 1894, special state travel funds were appropriated so that professors could go to the fruit areas and help growers find solutions to problems. Initially, farm management research was based on surveys of what farmers actually were doing. Later, rural sociologists studied community organizations and the roles of individuals in these group activities.

Social and economic research has reported the results of management decisions made by individuals and groups, and the findings have been useful in planning future activities. However, in the 1950's, questions began to be raised on "how" decisions are made and what might be done to improve decision-making. Again Cornell researchers have turned to farm families to find answers.

In 1968, a project was launched to observe how farm families made decisions. The method chosen for the study was tape recorded interviews with a panel of 20 New York farm families. The cooperation of families on different types of farms, and in various stages of the life cycle was obtained. It was planned that the study would run for a period of fifteen years to provide observations over time and under different conditions.

Families have been interviewed every other year over a ten-year period. All members of the family over seven years of age were interviewed individually and in family groups. The tape recordings have been analyzed to identify decision-making patterns and factors that seem to affect decisions.

Findings to date are presented in a series of family studies which describe the family and how they made their decisions. Individual names and places have been changed in the reports. The family which is the subject of this report read and approved the material prior to publication. Although few of us would feel comfortable about seeing our family situation in print, these families have agreed to do so.

This publication contains an analysis of one of the twenty families studied. Separate reports for other families will be available. These analyses can be used by teachers, extension workers, farmers, and others who are interested in decision making. They will also provide basic information for persons studying farm families or the decision making process. Further analysis of the panel of 20 families is in progress.

In the study, family and farm are viewed as a social system, the family and the farm being linked with other social and physical systems. In this

framework, our principal concern is the process of accommodation whereby family members sustain the system by supplying labor, management, and other resources, receiving in turn satisfactions sufficient to engender further support for the system. This process of accommodation is guided by procedures for governance which serve to determine the decisions produced. This conceptual framework makes it possible to identify system incompatibilities associated with the passage of time. For example, a procedure for making decisions which is satisfactory when associated with a short-term goal, such as annual income, may become unsatisfactory when associated with a long-term goal, for example, family continuity on the farm. It also provides us with a method of evaluation which is independent of professional commitments and personal values of the evaluator. We consider those decisions and procedures for making decisions to be desirable which sustain the system over time by keeping in balance resources required to maintain the system and the capacity of the system to meet individual needs and aspirations.

HOW FARM FAMILIES MAKE DECISIONS

THE CROCKERS

"I usually try, you know, to okay it with them"

Pam Crocker

Harold and Emma Crocker, now in their early forties, operate a 80 acre poultry farm in Trout Creek, New York. With the help of four children, they manage nine thousand three hundred hens and three thousand five hundred pullets, grow corn for sale, and hold off-farm jobs. The Crockers share the risk and income of the poultry business with a contractor who supplies the birds, feed, and market.

Getting Started

Harold is a second generation part-time farmer. His parents owned a twenty-four acre farm in Trout Creek, but his father's principal income came from working for an agricultural supply cooperative. Because his job involved frequent relocations, Harold attended school in several New York communities. The farm in Trout Creek remained the home base while the family moved from town to town. In 1951, they returned to live there.

Harold wanted to be a farmer since childhood. He worked weekends and during the summer on his parents' farm, did chores for neighboring farmers, and helped a cousin who owned a dairy farm located across the road. On the death of his cousin in 1953, Harold took over this farm. He was seventeen years old and completing high school. Harold arranged to rent the land and purchase the machinery by taking out a bank loan co-signed by his father. Since he continued to live at home, the house on his farm became a source of rental income.

Emma grew up on a dairy farm ten miles away. She and Harold met in high school and started dating in her senior and his junior year. In 1967, Mrs. Crocker laughed and recalled, "Oh, before I met Harold, I said I wouldn't marry a farmer, I think mainly because of being tied down, you know, no weekends and that." Emma graduated from high school, then worked as a bookkeeper. In 1957, she married Harold and moved into the house on his farm. She worked for a lumber company until the birth of Pam in 1958. The Crockers have three other children: Judy, born in 1960; Gail in 1963; and Alexander in 1965.

Commitment to location Harold developed a lasting affection for Trout Creek. His decision to become a farmer was consistent with this commitment to location. Buying his cousin's farm enabled him to remain in the community while pursuing a career he enjoyed. Emma has come to share Harold's attachment to the community and to the land, having exchanged a healthy and supportive atmosphere in which to raise a family for limitations on her ability to travel. Today, two decades later, continuity on the farm in Trout Creek remains one of the family's highest priorities. While honoring their emotional bonds to farming and to location, the Crockers have made a series of planned adaptations to economic reality.

Harold Crocker seems to be intrigued by the internal tug-of-war between economic and emotional considerations. He reported that he wanted to buy his parents' farm in 1976 when his father decided to sell. The Crockers had been renting the farm's total tillable land, seven acres, to grow corn, but Harold wanted the land for the "sole privilege of owning it," not for its utility. "I would've loved to own it," he said in 1978, "and I offered more for it than it was worth for farm land... For what I offered I probably would've never paid for it." A competitor, not a family member, wanted the farm to raise a few animals and crops for fun. He was willing to pay an even higher price. Although it seems that his father would have honored family ties, Harold told his father to accept the more profitable offer.

From Dairy to Poultry

The year after their marriage, the Crockers were continuing the farm operation of Harold's cousin; they managed a herd of twenty-five dairy cows. Between 1958 and 1963, they made a transition from dairy to poultry. The farm operation in 1963 was essentially the same as it is today except that many of Emma's farm tasks have been passed along to the children. The transition to poultry occurred by increments.

Initiating a sequence of decisions In June, 1958, the Crockers added a pullet business to their dairy operation. This step reflected a method of adaptation characterized by gradual adjustment to circumstance, reluctance to take extensive risk, and reliance on the advice of friends. The initial step was not part of a long range plan for development. In 1967, Emma recalled, "Well, we had an empty brooder house out there that was just sitting there, and we never thought about raising pullets in it until we got to be personal friends with a salesman from a hatchery and he sort of, you know, talked to us and thought we might as well use that building..." Once exposed to the idea, Harold sought other opinions. "I did talk to a lot of farmers. Like I said, I was really kind of green at it. I had never spent a whole lot of time with chickens." The building and equipment were in good condition. The installation of water constituted the major conversion necessary to renovate.

References for decisions: values and skills

Although learning by doing may seem an adventurous approach to farming, the Crockers were risking little capital. They were actually engaged in reducing uncertainty because they knew they needed an alternative to dairying. In 1967, Harold commented, "I kept twenty-five (cows) and about ten head of young stock, and I just didn't have enough land and there wasn't - there wasn't any land available to buy. Sometimes I wonder if I should have done that or not, because I had...I had a good herd I wasn't ashamed of. But I was small in barn space and my barn is old and...the time was coming when I had to put up another silo, build a milk house, and whatever I did, I was going to have to spend money."

The Crockers managed both cows and chickens until they sold the cows in 1963. By this time they were familiar with the poultry business and realized that it would not be economically feasible to continue a dairy operation on their land unit. The decision to abandon the dairy and concentrate solely on chickens was difficult. Over the years, the family had become attached to their herd. Harold said in 1967, "I can still think where they stood and I can still probably name them." Faced with a direct conflict between continuity in type of farming and continuity in location, they chose to give up the cows.

Harold and Emma entered the pullet business when it was profitable and initially made more from the pullet than from the dairy operation. In a fluctuation typical of the poultry business, the good times ended after the first year. "The egg market dropped bad, and as soon as that dropped, that in turn hit the pullet business..." Harold and Emma began to raise pullets on contract. Although any profit was shared with the company which provided the birds and feed, so was the risk. After talking with friends about potential contractors, Harold accepted an offer from a hatchery that sought his cooperation. "It was better than the contracts that are out today," he recalls. After 1967, the Crockers also began producing eggs under contract; the market that year had been a disaster.

Sequence culminates in reorganization

The same year that the Crockers sold their cows, they arranged to construct a building for laying hens. This involved a substantial loan. Though Harold justified debt as "something you have to live with," Emma was more reluctant. She commented that Harold had consulted his father, "a natural optimist," who was unlikely to consider the negative aspects of being in debt. "I wasn't really, really optimistic that all this indebtedness was going to be, you know, easy enough to pay off to make it worthwhile." Before 1963, the Crockers were still leasing their farm. In order to borrow money to build the chicken house, they needed to own the land it would occupy. To obtain both land and building, they mortgaged the farm and the laying house, taking out a second mortgage on the building with the Farmers Home Administration.

Recommended practices conflict with commitment to location

Agway, the largest agricultural supply cooperative in the northeast, advised the Crockers to build a structure twice as large as they did. However, when Harold and Emma applied for the loan, both Agway and their bank refused to extend enough credit to enable them to follow this advice. They fixed a limit to the amount of money they were willing to give, and this figure was insufficient to cover the cost of a building that large. Emma said, "They told us what their exact limit was on the farm...no matter how much we spent, they'd invest... only so much in it." From the perspective of suppliers of farm services, the building the Crockers built was uneconomical and therefore obsolete, but the building that was recommended to the family would have required relocating the business, an unacceptable solution to the Crockers. Harold talked to a regional Extension poultry specialist and looked at operations in Dryden and Homer and outside Albany before contracting to have the poultry house built. To cut costs, he and a cousin built the cages.

Conflict resolution

Mrs. Crocker acknowledges the difficulties associated with running a small scale poultry farm. During the first interview in 1967, she said, "And the size of the operation we have now, we...were able to meet all of our obligations time the way it was scheduled when the price (of eggs) is higher. But when it's lower, you can't. So that's why we keep wonder you know. We know this isn't a wise set up." Mrs. Crocker was talking from a financial perspective when she made this comment. Both she and Harold realized that the most probable alternative to building the poultry house and going into debt was going out of farming. They never seriously considered that. In 1978, Emma explained why she thought her husband would always be a farmer. "He just loves this land and I think he loves the independence of it and he loves making his own decisions and he just loves it so that that's what he should do." In view of their priorities, it seems that the Crockers acted prudently in building the hen house contrary to expert advice.

Allocating Labor

Utilizing surplus labor

Harold and Emma solved the dilemma of how to combine small scale farming with the need for an adequate and secure income by means of off-farm work. In 1963, Harold took a job as a substitute school bus driver. After determining over the course of a year that he could operate the poultry business while working off the farm, a permanent position opened up, "so I took it and I told them at the time that if I thought something was going to suffer at home, I'd quit, that's all." Harold discovered that this job was compatible with his farm work. He simply arranged to feed the birds and clean the buildings around an early morning and late afternoon bus schedule. Although bad weather and break-

Compatibility of activities downs have been sources of distress, over all Harold enjoys driving the school bus. He likes children, and he likes the mix of tasks which farming and driving a school bus provide.

Adjusting resources and markets Shortly after building the hen house, Harold remodeled part of the barn to accommodate more pullets. By 1963, the Crockers had their basic set-up: approximately seven thousand one hundred hens and three thousand five hundred pullets, thirty-nine acres of corn as a cash crop, and rental of a few acres of pasture. In addition, from 1968 to 1976, they raised nine thousand pullets in a nearby barn which they rented. Characteristically, the Crockers acted on the suggestion of their contractor when they decided to raise these birds, and they discontinued doing so when the contractor no longer called for the service. Emma said in 1978, "The people he was raising for didn't ask him to raise any more, you see, and he, probably because of it being more hours than it was easy to put in, didn't actively go search out a new person to grow them for." Harold mentioned that after figuring out how much he was getting "it seemed like every flock, my net was getting smaller and smaller." Thus, the Crockers continued a pattern until it was broken by some external agency. The family did not try to renew the enterprise, because returns were not commensurate with the energy invested.

Harold and Emma also discontinued a retail business. Prior to 1974, they sold about twenty cases of eggs a week to local stores and restaurants. The business gradually reached the point where the burden outweighed the rewards. Harold did not enjoy the work. "It does take extra hours...you've got to process these eggs, you've got to crate them and candle them...and it all takes time, ...and I did a lot of this nights and... we got to the point where... I really thought it wasn't worth the extra trouble it was taking."

Organizing for Another Decade

Evaluating resources After the poultry equipment had been used for thirteen years, it was so thoroughly worn that the cages were in constant need of repair. Harold and Emma checked out the basics before deciding to renovate within their existing building. They were certain of their contractor's intention to continue replacing flocks. Harold said, "I had one fella who was interested and I knew was sound enough...that if I spent the money, he will, you know, put the birds in to keep me going." They were also sure of their management ability and labor supply. At this time, Pam was about to enter college, and Judy had two years left of high school. Gail and Alex were thirteen and ten, respectively, so Harold and Emma could expect the help of at least two children for several years. In 1976, the Crockers increased the number of layers from seven thousand one hundred to nine thousand three hundred by installing a third tier of cages and adding cages along the wall where

New equipment improved utilization of building unused space was available. Cages, water systems, feed troughs, and pit cleaners were purchased new to avoid headaches associated with used equipment. This expansion did not require the construction of another building, so it didn't increase the tax burden. It did, however, require a fourteen thousand dollar loan which was obtained from a local bank.

Decision Making - References and Processes

Decision references: family needs and opportunities Family members supported these alterations. They realized that if these facilities had not been renovated, the family would have been forced out of farming. This was similar to the situation they faced in 1963 when they made the transition from dairy to poultry. The Crockers also knew there would be monetary benefits from the expansion. Although Harold and Emma are not borrowing to help pay for their children's education, they have tried to increase their income by managing more birds. The expansion also justified the debt. By making more money from their laying operation, the family was better equipped to carry the interest on the loan.

Distribution of rewards, open communication, parental acceptance of authority, commitment to personal worth The Crockers discuss important changes and try to resolve problems in ways which spread benefits to the entire family. They are able to choose solutions which have this outcome because communication between family members is effective and because individual needs and concerns revolve around family and community. All the Crockers seem to recognize that farming meets their needs. They are less committed to poultry but recognize that chickens keep them in farming. A sense of worth contributes to the lack of conflict in the family. At age fourteen, Gail summarized the influence that children have when she said that her parents listened to their opinions "somewhat. They listen to us and then they do what they think is practical." In saying that Harold and Emma did what was practical, Gail referred to weighing the many considerations which enter into decisions, including how she and the other kids felt.

Acquiring labor and management skills The children started doing chores when they were seven. While helping Harold gather eggs and feed and water the pullets, they realized that they were partially responsible for the family livelihood. They knew that they had a stake in the family system. At age nine, Pam told why she didn't mind gathering eggs every other night, a job she and Judy alternated. "When he decided that he wanted to drive a bus and if he drives bus, he would have to have some help because he wouldn't be able to get in in time." When he was seven years old, Alexander told an interviewer how farm tasks were organized on Saturday morning. Mrs. Crocker wrote down what chores each child had to do, taking into consideration each child's preference. Alex said, "We think of jobs we like to do...and whenever we get a job done we look and see what else we got to do." In this manner, all the kids worked together until the chores were completed.

The children are familiar with many facets of the farm operation, but none has the expertise to handle it entirely. Besides helping with the poultry, they have picked corn the harvester missed at the ends of the field. Pam and Judy have driven the tractor while fitting the land. Alex mows the lawn. Of all the children, he is the most interested in farming. Although he does not operate the equipment himself, he is aware of what machines are used for the various tasks.

The children receive an allowance which is regarded as compensation for labor. They are not paid an hourly wage, but the amount they receive increased as they grew older and as they assumed more responsibility. Mrs. Crocker said in 1978, "Harold and I determine how much it's going to be...They are not paid more if they do it well or more if they do more. Because they're just expected to do what we ask them to do, and then they get their allowance. We don't hold it over their heads... we don't do that. We just pay them and we expect that work and, you know, pretty much they do the work."

Children's response to parental expectations

The children appreciate the non-material benefits of their situation: living in the country among friends and relatives and working beside their parents. They are also aware that they have more responsibility than many of their friends. Rather than feeling imposed upon, they accept this responsibility as part of the family system. Shortly before graduating from high school, Judy commented, "I think it's good. Its helped me...the responsibility I think helped me quite a bit because I can be responsible and I've learned a lot...like especially cooking and things like that." Judy feels that she is more mature and better prepared to support herself than most of her classmates. At age twelve, Alex said, "I'd rather live on a farm." He continued, "Well, you never get bored...you can feel free to go take a walk if you want to and you don't have to stay cooped up all the time." Alex also said, "Oh, I can work with my father and have fun and the family does things together more." Reflecting a family concern about being practical, he added, "it keeps me out of trouble."

Skills and commitment of children release mother's labor

When the children were young, Emma helped gather eggs and water pullets. She took orders for the retail business and, in general, helped Harold who found these chores more than he could handle while driving the school bus. For many years, Emma mentioned that it would be financially beneficial if she were to get an off-farm job, but she was reluctant to do so. She felt needed at home. She thought it important to be present in the morning when the children went to school and in the evening when they returned. In addition, she knew the services she performed on the farm were helping to maintain the farm operation.

As the two older daughters began to assume more responsibility toward the house and toward caring for the younger children, and as the family income from the retail business and the pullet operation dwindled, Emma became less reluctant to work. She talked to friends

Compatibility between farm and off-farm activities

about job possibilities. A part time secretary who was one of her acquaintances, decided to leave her position. She recommended that Mrs. Crocker be hired in her place. Thus, in 1973, Emma became employed for thirty-five hours a week as office manager and bookkeeper, a position which utilizes her skills. Mrs. Crocker enjoys what she does. She mentioned in 1978, "I don't feel like anybody's boss... it's like a family relationship in that, like in the family, there are tensions sometimes, but they're never really bad tensions."

Compatibility of values

The Crockers evaluate monetary considerations in the context of family relationships and personal characteristics. It was Mrs. Crocker's decision to go back to work. Harold did not want to persuade her one way or the other. Emphasis upon the non-material aspects of life is reflected in their approach to family development. Emma observed in 1975 that they are raising their children to be honest productive people. Using their Christian faith as a guide, they are trying to provide a home atmosphere that will develop these qualities. Part of their commitment to Trout Creek stems from their belief that farm life is particularly conducive to their goals because it gives children a sense of being needed.

Division of Tasks and Cooperation in Making Decisions

The children have developed into considerate and competent people. When Emma wasn't home to do chores, they assumed many of her tasks. The girls had previously helped cook, clean, and wash dishes, but when Mrs. Crocker started working, Pam and Judy began to make dinner each night and keep the house in order. Gail and Alex also helped prepare meals, especially after Pam left for college. When Judy goes to college this fall, they will have even more responsibilities. As Alex said in 1978, "Well, it will... take me longer to get through chores and stuff, and I won't have as much time to play and stuff, but my other sister usually helps out with me 'cause I'm slower than they are on chores... so it won't really bother me much I guess."

Although the children are aware that the labor they provide is essential to the farm operation, they do not use their position to bargain for greater independence. When in their mid-teens, Pam and Judy continued to ask permission to go to dances and football games. They often sought their parents' opinion on decisions they expected to make themselves. When she was sixteen, Pam selected her own clothes but made sure that Mrs. Crocker approved her choice. She said, "If I can do something, I ask both of them, make sure it's all right. Or if it's a decision of mine, then I usually try, you know, to okay it with them." In 1975, Judy was asked if she would do anything differently than the way her parents were bringing her up. She replied, "...not really. I don't think so. I'm pretty happy."

At the core of the family is the relationship between Harold and Emma. It is noteworthy that Mr. and Mrs. Crocker have not divided their lives into domains where the husband has authority on the farm while the wife has the authority in the house. Each, however, has an area of expertise. When growing corn or managing chickens is involved, Emma offers suggestions but stresses that it is her husband's decision

"'cause it's really his job and... if he were working for someone else when he had responsibility to make decisions, I wouldn't be making them." In 1975, she said, "I mean it's not fifty-fifty. Nothing is, you know, equal, but I'm satisfied with the amount of decision I make for the most part." Emma knows what is happening on the farm. Harold acts with her advice and consent. He keeps the books; she prepares the tax returns. Harold, in turn, has a large voice in household matters. Both decide how to decorate the house. Referring to the purchase of wallpaper, Emma commented that she liked her husband's taste. "I respect his judgement 'cause if I pick it out myself it never looks quite as good as when he picked it out." They also share the responsibility for meeting the children's needs. This is clearly illustrated in how they deal with problems. Emma said, "But if it's really a problem, the child considers it a problem, Harold and I will talk to each other and to them about it...about what could be done."

Mrs. Crocker values and depends on her husband's support. She would not have taken an off-farm job without his approval. Emma believes that when misunderstandings occur, they have arisen due to a lack of communication. She knows that stability in a family requires continuous effort. When asked in 1978 what she expected in the future, she replied, "You know, I just don't know what to expect, and I don't even really, really know what I want. I hope our marriage stays healthy and happy 'cause I know lots of times it doesn't when the kids leave home."

Family attachments The Crockers are an integral part of an extended family. Most of Harold's family lives close to the farm, and many of Emma's relatives also live nearby. Parents and children enjoy participating in the larger family. They frequently visit parents and grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, and attend weddings and showers. Mrs. Crocker once said, "If you live far away it seems like your life might be less complicated, but I think it wouldn't be as nice."

Community Involvement

Church and community attachments Besides strong family ties, the Crockers are very active in an Episcopal church located about eleven miles from their home. They look forward to its annual harvest dinner and spring chicken barbecue. Harold is a vestryman and Emma has taught Sunday school. She has served as church treasurer and president of the women's association. When a new priest was chosen, the Crockers were involved in the selection. The church is a friendship as well as a religious center. For ten years, Emma and Harold have belonged to a pinochle club consisting of members of the congregation. Mr. and Mrs. Crocker also participate in other community activities. Emma used to belong to the PTA. In 1967, she served as vice president of the county home demonstration unit. Harold has been a member of the governing board of the county Extension service, and a volunteer fireman.

The children have followed their parents' example. All have attended Sunday school and church and sung in the school choir. All belong or have belonged to 4-H. The children enjoy the activities associated with

the groups they join. They have particularly enjoyed 4-H. Judy won many ribbons for cooking and participated in projects ranging from chick embryology to the study of bird nests. Gail sews beautifully and was selected to be an alternate competitor at the state fair. Alex raises prize rabbits. Recently, he sold one of his animals to a breeder, a demonstration of production and business skills. In addition to these activities, Alex belongs to Little League, and Judy belonged to several school associations.

Social and career skill development The children are serious about their participation in organizations. Pam became a Girl Scout when she was 9 years old. By the time she was in ninth grade, she wanted to quit the Scouts and join 4-H, but she continued with her troop because she felt that she owed them some more of her time. In 1971, she had traveled with them to New York City, a trip arranged only once every three years. Pam had gone shortly after she became a cadet, "'cause I went to New York my first year there and I didn't earn any of my money like, you know, I worked at one bake sale or something...and that's it. And so I feel that I have an obligation to the troop to stay in it and earn the money."

It does not appear that any of the girls will continue in farming. After graduating from high school in 1976, Pam enrolled at Alfred where she finished a two year program in accounting. She is now looking for a job in this field. Pam is confident about her ability and determined to find work that uses the skills she has learned at college. Judy aspired to be a nurse since early childhood. She completed high school in June of 1978 and, like her sister, will attend Alfred. She has been accepted in a two year nursing program. Gail, now fourteen, is looking toward a career where she could use her sewing ability. At twelve, Alex does not see the future so clearly. Asked if he wants to be a farmer, he answered, "Well, I've lived on a farm all my life so I want to try something new." Alex enjoys learning about farming and may change his mind.

Within their close and cohesive family, the Crockers give each other a good deal of freedom. Each member is encouraged to follow his interests. In 1978, Emma mentioned that she would be happy with whatever any of the children do so long as they are content. She thought that her son, because he is the most interested, could continue the family operation if it remained on contract. Then she added, "Harold might be disappointed if Alex didn't (stay in farming), but I don't think I would because I think he should do what he wants to do. Harold is doing what he wants with his life and it's not the same thing his father did."

Adjusting to limitation Although the Crockers derive much satisfaction from the farm, there are a few goals that this way of life has not been able to fulfill. Emma would love to take a long family vacation and travel. However, in twenty years, the family has gone on only one vacation, and that was limited to a long weekend. In the fall of 1970, they were managing fewer birds than usual; a cycle was ended, and replacements hadn't been installed. After hiring a neighborhood boy to look after the remaining birds, the Crockers went to a car museum outside Harrisburg, for Harold is very interested in antique cars. The Crockers also visited Amish country and the Hershey chocolate factory.

Although Mrs. Crocker expected that by marrying a farmer she would limit her opportunity to travel, she and the children have succeeded in traveling. Each summer Mrs. Crocker has taken them to the Jersey shore or to New York to visit a childhood friend. She, Judy, and Gail went on a 4-H trip to Amish country, and she and the children have gone camping. Harold and Emma never had a vacation together until their twentieth anniversary. On this occasion, the children had a garage sale to earn money to give their parents to help pay expenses. They took care of the farm while Harold and Emma spent three days in the Hudson Valley. Judy has been the traveler in the family. In 1975, using money she had earned, she went with a school group to Germany and Austria. In 1978, she traveled with the school French Club to Quebec. She has also gone to Washington, D.C. The rest of the Crockers seem pleased that Judy has had the opportunity to visit so many places.

Weakest link The weakest link in the Crocker farm operation is a dependence on the continuity of Harold's good health. There is no one to whom he can entrust the farm for an extended period of time. Other members of the family and relatives do not know enough about the total day to day operation to assume responsibility. Harold recognizes that the family would be in trouble if he were seriously disabled. The Crockers have hospitalization insurance and carry farm liability insurance to reduce the risk of a large medical bill or a bad accident but they have no way to compensate for the absence of Harold's management. In 1978, Mr. Crocker commented, "They (the children) could get by for awhile...that's one of the things when you're running it by yourself, if something does happen...if you get sick or something...I don't know, that sure would be a problem. I don't know what would happen."

Long range planning The Crockers expect their present cages and machinery to last another 10 years. They have no plans beyond this date. When the equipment wears out, Harold will be 52 years old. He has thought of finding a year round full time job, but feels hampered due to limited education. Repeatedly during interviews, he mentioned that he wished he had extended his education beyond high school. Harold has been involved in agriculture all his life and cannot think of a profession he would enjoy as much. In 1973 he said, "I no doubt would stay in the poultry business the rest of my life if there was a little more money in it."

Although the need to have a steady and sufficient income has forced Harold and Emma Crocker to combine poultry farming with off-farm employment, they continue to think of themselves as a farm family. They maintain this self-image even though their jobs as bus driver and office manager accounted for 80% of their net income of \$15,000, the average for the three years 1975-1977. The financial benefits from farming are greater than these figures suggest because IRS regulations allow the poultry business to carry some of what under other circumstances would be non-deductible household expenses; still, it is clear that substantially less than half the family income is produced by the farm.

The Crockers realize that increasing taxes may force them to sell the farm. They have mentioned the possibility of financing their retirement by selling the farm, but they would do this with great reluctance. Over the years, they have remodeled the children's bedrooms, paneled the upstairs hall and bought pieces of furniture they had wanted. Although Harold and Emma had not made all the improvements they would like because college expenses have called for belt-tightening, they have managed to achieve many aspirations for making their home comfortable and attractive.

Commitment to their house is reinforced by commitment to the land. Over two decades, the entire family has acquired Harold's love for this farm. Mr. Crocker, at least, is well aware of other values. In 1973, he commented, "I know I've got some potentially valuable land. I haven't sold anything and I think I'll hang right on to it. It's really one of the few hedges I have against inflation right now." Harold and Emma will probably do as they have always done and be guided, although not necessarily directed, by circumstances.

The question of success

Whatever happens, Harold and Emma know they have achieved their most important goal, raising four considerate and responsible children. In 1975, Mr. Crocker was asked about his idea of success. He replied, "Well, I figure I'm a success. I'm not a failure. I figure I'm successful when I just, you know, make these decisions whether to keep the poultry business or to get out...and I've got...a nice wife and family, and... turned out happy and successful, although I don't have much money."

SUMMARY

Farming for the Crockers has been both means and end. It has provided satisfactions for members of the family and, in conjunction with off-farm jobs, has enabled the Crockers to live where they chose. The Crockers recognized that dairying, their initial enterprise, did not have long-term possibilities on this farm because additional land was unavailable. This observation, coupled with advice from a friend about putting a building into use, initiated a six year period of mixed farming which culminated with poultry as an alternative to dairying. The Crockers, then, reaffirmed their commitment to location by erecting a building to house laying hens. Since the location lacked the resources for a poultry operation on a scale which would support a family, the Crockers became locked into a mix of farm and off-farm employment. In selecting off-farm jobs Mr. and Mrs. Crocker have used as criteria compatibility with the labor requirements of the poultry operation, the needs of family members, and the skills and interests of the persons marketing surplus labor.

Decisions in the Crocker family range in order of magnitude from dividing daily tasks among family members to re-equipping the poultry operation and realigning off-farm activities at intervals of 10 to 15 years. Procedures for making the decisions are much the same. Specialization and gathering of information **are combined with** considerable overlapping among family members in the exercise of authority, an approach well adapted where the common interest or **consensus** is the goal. This procedure could break down if the exercise of authority by children were unconstrained by the parents but, in the course of the project, this problem has not been evident. The dependency of decision-making upon advice from friends is no weakness, given the Crockers' capacity for friendship.

Judging from an economic perspective, the Crocker farm does not reflect the best use of resources in terms of unit costs and production per unit of labor. These criteria, however, have only limited relevance where the farm operation is not intended to be competitive. The economics of hobby farming is not applicable either because the family depends on the farm to produce part of its income. The Crocker farm is at least, and nothing less than, a business integrated with other income producing activities, a source of direct satisfactions, and a child development facility where children feel needed.

It should be evident that the contributions of this farm family to its members, the community, and the nation are not the outcome of casual management. The level of management in day-to-day activities and long-range planning does not seem much different from that required for much larger farm operations. Any appearance of simplicity is due, in large part, to the clarity with which Mr. and Mrs. Crocker have identified their values and established priorities among them. These values, in turn, have served as continuing references for planning the allocation of family resources.