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Howard A. Gilbert

South Dakota State University

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Attitudes of Some South Dakota Farmers Towards Residential and Vocational Changes

A recent study by the Economics Department asked the question: What are some of the factors that cause some people to leave farming or take part-time jobs while others quit their jobs to go into full-time farming? While the study was not exhaustive, 91 past or present farmers and ranchers were interviewed to obtain a sampling of the reasons given for the changes. A summary of their responses is given below.

As a vocation, farming (or ranching) was considered by many to offer equal or superior income opportunities although the risk would be higher. They did not consider the prestige of the farmer or his leisure time to be significantly different from that for non-farm employment.

The rural residence was felt to be a superior place to raise children and to offer less costly family living. Convenience of rural living was generally tied to the distance to the place of primary employment of the head of the household. Those who expected higher income, (as well as greater risk) from farming also tended to be those who associated the farm or ranch with lower living costs and as a good place to raise children.

Exits from farming were as likely to be due to voluntary reasons (e.g., economic practicality) as due to uncontrollable factors. Most unavoidable exits were due to non-economic factors (e.g., health, age, loss of access to land, etc.)

Most of the people, whether they moved into farming or out of it, were

satisfied with the decision. Generally, the expected income changes and other benefits were not disappointing.

One of the more serious problems was associated with those farmers who thought opportunities were greater in non-farm work but had little or no training or experience in other occupations. Both full- and part-time farmers were most commonly held in farming by their favorable attitudes about living and working conditions on farms and ranches.

Farmers seeking more security (and less risk) frequently undertook only a partial exit from full-time farming, perhaps feeling that farm living offered a degree of security that they were not anxious to completely relinquish.

Those who changed jobs and succeeded in obtaining higher incomes than they expected were more satisfied than those whose income merely increased.

Full-time farmers and ex-farmers were generally more satisfied with their vocations than were part-time farmers. Those who changed to part-time farming also tended to realize a lower income

than those who went into full-time farming or were ex-farmers.

In sum, movement into or out of farming usually resulted in improved incomes. Many respondents found somewhat less satisfaction when they sought security by entering part-time farming. As might be expected, the study indicated that additional and/or improved non-farm income opportunities for part-time farmers would (1) likely increase their satisfaction, (2) deter some further entry into farming, and (3) encourage additional partial exits from farming.

No evidence was found indicating that those leaving the farm had greater labor adjustment problems than other occupational groups moving from one industry to another. However, farmers without training and experience in other occupations found alternate employment less readily available.

Adjustment problems could be reduced by:

1. Increasing income opportunities for part-time farmers. This may be done by encouraging employers to locate where this labor is available.
2. Improving commuting facilities for part-time farmers. Examples of this would be to design and improve commuter roads and provide adequate parking for autos at the place of employment.
3. Increasing vocational mobility of farmers by making retraining available to full-time farmers desiring to move.
4. Publicizing availability and benefits of alternative employment opportunities and retraining programs.

Howard A. Gilbert, Associate Professor - Economics

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