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4-H CLUB WORK IN PUERTO RICO

A radio talk by Mrs. Ola Powell Malcolm, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered in the National 4-H Club Radio Program, April 6, 1935, and broadcast by a network of 59 associate NBC radio stations.

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Four-H Club Work is beginning in Puerto Rico much the same way as the girls' club work began in the Southern States in 1910.

Federal money under the Smith-Lever Act has been available to Puerto Rico only since July first, 1934. During these few months people in all parts of the Island have shown much interest in the plan to have the farmer or members of his family undertake demonstrations on the farm or in the home which show the advantages of using improved methods of farming and home-making.

Six native home demonstration agents have been appointed, given some special training in extension methods and an opportunity to make a study of living conditions among farm families located in the areas assigned to each. Other studies have revealed that the food bill is the largest item of expense in the Puerto Rican home.

These home demonstration agents have a unique opportunity for service in furnishing farm families of Puerto Rico with the information and guidance that will enable them to improve their conditions and obtain a higher standard of living in country homes throughout the Island.

The home demonstration agents have found large numbers of girls in country districts not in school, who are interested in, and eager to learn, how to grow and care for a vegetable garden and fruit trees, or a poultry flock or bees or rabbits as a means of increasing the amount of food needed to protect the health of their families and gain, if possible, a small amount of cash which they may receive from the sale of products not used at home. Already 243 girls have asked to undertake home demonstrations in gardening and poultry raising. One agent reports a group learning to can fruits and vegetables while another agent is helping a group of girls who are working on the improvement of their homes and beautifying their home grounds.

The home demonstration agents at their recent conference decided that their 4-H club work should be based on productive activities and be closely allied to the Puerto Rican agricultural needs.

The Agricultural Division of the Relief Administration has offered to give its assistance by cooperating in securing seed, baby chicks, rabbits and other needed materials for such club girls as may be entitled to them.

The ready response and enthusiasm shown everywhere encourages us to believe that the 4-H club organization for girls as a part of the home demonstration plan of work will bring about some very successful and significant results.

Dr. Barrus, Director of Extension Service in Puerto Rico, has advised "Our experience with these girls' clubs should be valuable in helping us to know what to do in organizing boys' clubs." As yet very little 4-H club work has been conducted with the boys except for a few forestry demonstrations in 1931 under the direction of the Extension Forester.

In Puerto Rico instead of growing and canning vegetables during summer months for use in the winter as we do, they grow their gardens during the winter months to provide their supply of canned vegetables for use in the hot summer. Although there are some fruits and vegetables all year there are certain months when they are more abundant. "Most food crops grown in Puerto Rico are seasonal and are not available throughout the year unless preserved or imported." Meat production on the farm is also seasonal and there exists a real need for extending the period when meat and meat products could be available to the farm families. Because refrigeration facilities are meager in country homes and there is a lack of knowledge regarding the preservation of foods, much saving could be realized by spreading information about successful canning and preserving of all food products.

Canning is a new story in Puerto Rico. Recently under a cooperative agreement between the Extension Service and the R. A., a Home Canning Program has been launched. During the month of March, the six home demonstration agents with the help of 12 canning assistants employed by the Relief Administration, have given more than 25 public lecture demonstrations in the canning of native fruits, vegetables, fish and meat. These canning meetings in the two weeks between March 3rd and 20th, were attended by 3500 persons and demands increase daily from farm families desiring more help along this line. It is difficult to realize that just a few months ago few persons on the Island knew anything about canning.

Puerto Rico will be everlastingly grateful to the Extension Service in Florida, Georgia, and Texas, the States who so generously have lent or released home demonstration agents from their staffs to assist in the training of new agents and canning assistants and help them in establishing in Puerto Rico successful methods of canning and preserving their food products.

Because money, as well as surplus food crops, can be saved by canning, this program is recognized as one of great importance to the development of a profitable agriculture in Puerto Rico. In their pioneer work, the Puerto Rican home demonstration agents are assuming their share of responsibility in the general extension program of developing and utilizing the resources of the Island to the end that farm homes may be placed upon a higher plane of profit, comfort, culture, influence and power.

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