

# The Farmer and the Atom: The Iowa State Cooperative Extension Service and Rural Civil Defense, 1955–1970

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ON NOVEMBER 17 AND 18, 1961, at the National Guard Armory in Hampton, Iowa, more than 2,600 people from every corner of Franklin County and surrounding areas, wandered through a 21-booth exhibit on rural civil defense. At each booth well-rehearsed volunteers employed colorful displays to explain the various aspects of surviving atomic explosions: protecting livestock, crops, and gardens from radioactive fallout and preparing farm families to deal with the aftermath of a nuclear war. Attendees viewed five “model” shelters and learned about emergency sanitation, home nursing techniques, radiological monitoring, and even recreation in the fallout shelter. Although Franklin County, located in north central Iowa, was more than 180 miles away from any likely target cities, the people there overwhelmingly requested that civil defense be made a part of the Iowa State Cooperative Extension Service family program that year.<sup>1</sup>

The Franklin County Extension Service, under the leadership of County Extension Director R. Pearl Kelsey, spearheaded the rural civil defense exhibit, but more than 450 individuals

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1. “Franklin County,” *Annual Narrative Reports of County Extension Agents* (Ames, 1962), 28–30 (hereafter cited as ANR).

from 41 different organizations helped organize and run the event. Even a county civil defense official was pleasantly surprised by the program's success. "I was against this because I have been working on civil defense for several years and we just couldn't get anyone interested and I thought it would be a failure," he said. "I admit I was wrong and will take none of the credit for the success of the program, the extension people are the folks who got the job done and they have done a grand job."<sup>2</sup>

Such enthusiasm was short lived, however, as the civil defense exhibit persuaded only a few rural Iowans to take precautions. Fourteen months after the exhibit, a survey conducted by the Iowa State Rural Sociology Extension Service found that none of those in attendance had constructed a family fallout shelter, and only 16 percent had designated a specific area in their home to be used for "fallout protection." An almost equal number, about 15 percent of attendees, actually stated that they opposed the idea of civil defense; they had done so before attending the event but they had remained firm in their convictions. Most of the 2,600 people who walked through the exhibit picked up one or two ideas that "might be useful," or they simply remembered some of the technical and scientific aspects of atomic warfare. Overall, the exhibit changed few minds, but it reinforced popular attitudes that atomic war was a real possibility and that even rural counties would be affected in the event of an attack.<sup>3</sup>

Although the exhibit took place in a small Iowa community, the event exemplified broader attitudes about civil defense during the early 1960s. Historian Paul Boyer has pointed out that in the years after 1945, when the first atomic bombs fell on Japan, Americans experienced brief periods of heightened awareness and activity when nuclear warfare came to the forefront of American politics and popular culture. The years between 1960 and 1963 marked one of the most active periods of civil defense preparation during the Cold War. By the late 1950s, Americans had become increasingly familiar with the dangers of radioac-

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2. Ibid.

3. George M. Beal, Paul Yarbrough, Gerald E. Klonglan, and Joe M. Bohlen, *Social Action in Civil Defense: The Strategy of Public Involvement in a County Civil Defense Educational Program*, Rural Sociology Report 34 (Ames, 1964), 31.

tive fallout when evidence linked atmospheric testing with high levels of the radioactive isotope strontium-90 in milk. Furthermore, President John F. Kennedy actively encouraged Americans to construct private shelters, sought to increase the size of the military, and faced diplomatic crises with Berlin and Cuba. During those years, atomic energy and warfare permeated American films, television, music, art, and literature, while families across the country reinforced basement rooms, and communities marked suitable buildings with yellow and black fallout shelter signs. A 1961 article in *Time* magazine noted that more Americans were interested in fallout protection than ever before. Talk of fallout shelters could be heard "at cocktail parties and P.T.A. meetings and family dinners, on busses and commuter trains and around office water coolers."<sup>4</sup>

As the activities in Franklin County illustrated, these civil defense preparations and fears of nuclear war were not distinct urban problems. Few rural communities could claim to be located in a first strike zone or in areas likely to be targeted by Soviet bombs and missiles, but rural and farm families understood that nuclear attacks on cities would have repercussions for the entire nation. They expressed many practical concerns about the dangers of fallout, preserving the nation's food supply, and maintaining infrastructure and power, fuel, and transportation networks. Unlike urban residents, they had to be concerned about outdoor work schedules, crop yields, the quality of livestock, and caring for refugees from the cities. This is not to imply that civil defense preparations consumed the lives of rural Americans. Curiosity, more than fear or panic, prompted rural residents to seek information and reassurance from knowledgeable sources, including Extension personnel.

Throughout the 1960s, the Iowa State Extension Service created educational civil defense programs at the request of rural residents and organizations, especially farm women. For a few years, between 1960 and 1963, these programs enjoyed an eager audience. Extension workers adopted a common-sense approach

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4. Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), 352-59; "Civil Defense: The Sheltered Life," *Time*, 10/20/1961, 21, quoted in Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Bomb* (New York, 1993), 128.

to civil defense. Their programs were designed to unite communities, foster cooperation between civil and social organizations, reach across class lines, and even span the rural-urban divide. Most civil defense programs had been developed at the federal level, then administered in Iowa through the Extension Service's Family Living programs or the Community and Public Affairs activities. Focusing on more than just emergency preparation, these programs served as a means to unite communities and promote patriotic duties.

After 1963, however, public interest in civil defense waned throughout the United States. In keeping with this trend, civil defense programs gradually faded from Extension programming. In 1963 the United States signed the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which banned atmospheric testing, ended fears of peacetime fallout contamination, and reassured many Americans that war was no longer an imminent threat. The rhetoric associated with atomic energy also turned from despair to hope, as construction began on nuclear power plants across the country. At the same time, Americans grew increasingly troubled by the civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam, political assassinations, and youth rebellion. In Iowa, Extension personnel found that by the middle of the decade, rural residents no longer sought civil defense information. Instead, Iowans began to request more programs focused on Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, particularly the Economic Opportunity Act, which provided federal money for infrastructure and education. By 1968, with little demand for civil defense programs, the Federal Extension Service, administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), discontinued funding for rural civil defense education. At that point, any Extension activities in Iowa concerning civil defense became part of 4-H and children's programs.<sup>5</sup>

THROUGHOUT THE COLD WAR, civil defense activities in Iowa occurred as part of a general movement across the country to raise awareness about the potential dangers of nuclear weapons. In 1951 President Truman created the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) as a means to prepare the country and

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5. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 357.

its resources for nuclear war, but it would be another decade before educational programs became widely popular in the countryside. Rural civil defense was largely limited to a handful of farmers participating in the Ground Observers Corps. After 30 hours of training from the Air Force, ground observers combed the skies for enemy aircraft and maintained a web of telephone contacts to report any suspicious findings. Rural programs were limited partly because in the early 1950s most Americans knew very little about fallout or its potential to cover large areas, leaving the impression that rural areas would be spared in the event of an attack.<sup>6</sup>

The primary reason programs were so limited, however, was that during the 1950s few federal officials and planners could agree on the best means of protection. During the Eisenhower administration, within the rhetoric of his Mutually Assured Destruction policies around a nuclear umbrella, the FCDA received little funding for public instruction because many in Congress believed such preparation was too expensive and futile in the face of nuclear war. Furthermore, there was virtually no public demand for such instruction. Eisenhower believed that too much emphasis on civil defense would demoralize Americans and place them in a "defensive mood." Instead of a public shelter program in urban areas, he favored home shelters and evacuation policies, a relatively inexpensive, voluntary solution that could be delegated to state and local officials.<sup>7</sup>

Evacuation plans, however, were highly controversial because state planners often chose routes based on prevailing

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6. "Farmers Needed for Success Against Air Attack," *Successful Farming*, October 1952, 80–82.

7. In 1957 one cost estimate for a federal shelter program allowed \$430 per person, which included shelter, food, water, and medicine for one week. That figure, multiplied by the 87 million people who lived in urban target areas, added up to more than \$37 billion, a figure that did not include annual maintenance or take growing populations into account. Between 1951 and 1953, Congress demonstrated its disdain by rejecting proposals to fund urban bomb shelter programs, and throughout the 1950s, the FCDA received only about 20 percent of its requested budget. Kenneth D. Rose, *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (New York, 2001), 24–32. See also Paul G. Steinbicker, "Shelter or Evacuation?" *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 13 (1957), 166–68.

wind and weather conditions rather than directing evacuees toward communities able to feed, house, and maintain them. Furthermore, these plans rarely provided assistance to small, rural communities, most of which did not have the resources to establish efficient care centers. For example, in 1958 the state of Nebraska published a three-volume contingency plan. The plan provided for the evacuation of 640,000 people from several strategic military target cities, including Omaha, which was situated just north of Offutt Air Force Base. Part of the plan encouraged Omaha residents to seek safety in western Iowa, although there was no indication that planners in Nebraska had consulted state officials in Iowa or had arranged to cooperate with civil defense directors in Iowa counties. This was particularly troubling because the Nebraska plan expected rural residents to establish "Mass Care Centers," where large numbers of evacuees would receive food, health care, and sanitation for indefinite periods. Rural families would set up and run these care centers, often contributing their own food and supplies. Provisions for compensation were unclear, but rural families were to receive financial assistance only after they had provided services to refugees. Furthermore, the plan made no provision for assisting out-of-state families, such as those in Iowa.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, federal officials, including FCDA Director Val Peterson, formerly the governor of Nebraska, believed that refugees could depend on the goodwill of rural residents. In October 1954 an interviewer asked Peterson whether rural residents were legally obligated to help evacuees. An evasive Peterson said simply that laws existed, but they would never be needed. "You have a higher responsibility to your fellow man than that which is written in the law," he said. "And I should not be inclined to want to dispute my responsibility with the evacuees as they came into my front yard." In 1955 Iowa State Director of Civil Defense C. E. "Ben" Fowler reflected a similar notion when he called on farmers to volunteer their services. "You farmers of Iowa have a definite part to play in Civil Defense," he wrote. "When one of your neighbors is sick or injured, you

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8. Nebraska Survival Project, *State of Nebraska Operational Survival Plan: Basic Plan* (Lincoln, NE, 1958).

help him. That is what we ask you to do if a disaster should occur on a broader scale."<sup>9</sup>

THE DEBATE over rural civil defense changed significantly in 1954 and 1955, after military tests in the South Pacific revealed that radioactive fallout could spread over thousands of square miles. That realization placed rural Americans on the front lines of the Cold War and required new efforts to include them in civil defense preparations. In 1954, then, the FCDA created a series of training courses to deal with fallout, including one titled "Civil Defense in Rural Areas." The ten-hour course, aimed at county civil defense officials, covered the roles of "civil defense wardens," organizing communities, scientific and technical information about nuclear warfare, "controlling and reporting plant and animal disease," receiving refugees, and emergency sanitation measures.<sup>10</sup>

On December 30, 1955, in order to advance efforts in the countryside and to establish a more formal plan for rural America, the FCDA established the National Advisory Council on Rural Civil Defense. The council consisted of representatives from the FCDA and 24 organizations, including the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Farmers Union, the Na-

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9. "An Interview with Governor Val Peterson," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 10 (1954), 375-77; C. E. "Ben" Fowler, "Iowa Farmers Have Vital Role in Civil Defense," *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 21 (1/29/1955), 24. For most Americans, it was not the care of refugees but rather fears of the social aftermath that brought evacuation policies into question. In the West, many dreaded the evacuation of Los Angeles into small towns in northern California or into sparse desert communities, where resources would be quickly depleted. That scenario led Keith Dwyer, the civil defense coordinator for Riverside County, California, to urge the residents of his county to arm themselves with pistols. Likewise, Horace V. Grayson, the chief of police in Bakersfield, California, warned that all refugees should be turned away and "shown a route to some kind of refuge in the desert." Desert communities, however, would be just as inhospitable. J. Carlton Adair, head of the Las Vegas, Nevada, civil defense agency, proposed the creation of a 5,000-member militia to protect the city against refugees from southern California, who would "pick the valley clean of food, medical supplies, and other goods." Quoted in Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 98-100. There is little evidence that rural Iowans advocated such extreme measures, but it is important to note that resistance to housing refugees was present in the popular discourse of the 1950s.

10. Federal Civil Defense Administration (hereafter cited as FCDA), *Training Courses for Civil Defense* (Washington, DC, 1954), 3.

tional Grange, the National Association of Television and Radio Farm Directors, the American Agricultural Editors Association, the Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities, and the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives. Between 1955 and 1958, the council met four times per year to discuss the likelihood of an attack, the continuity of agricultural production and transportation of goods, rural areas' readiness to receive evacuees, stockpiling legislation, and continuity in civil defense programs between state and local governments.<sup>11</sup>

Although the National Advisory Council on Rural Civil Defense had little power to actually implement programs, it was part of a greater effort across the country to better organize and standardize civil defense preparations. By 1955, 86 of Iowa's 99 counties had appointed civil defense directors to oversee disaster preparedness and education, and Iowa State Director of Civil Defense C. E. "Ben" Fowler hoped to see all of the posts filled quickly. Yet programs varied by county, there were few standards, and it was up to local officials to design and implement their plans. Over the next five years, however, several developments encouraged the growth of civil defense across the nation and in Iowa. In 1958 the FCDA began funding local projects, and in 1959, the Iowa General Assembly passed the statewide Civil Defense Act, which provided for a central advisory committee and a state plan of action.<sup>12</sup>

That same year, in November 1959, the FCDA became the Office of Civil Defense Mobilization (OCDM) under the direction of former Iowa governor Leo Hoegh. Hoegh sought greater funding for civil defense and in 1959 reorganized the National Advisory Council on Rural Civil Defense into the new Rural Information Program. The same organizations that had served on the National Advisory Council continued their participation with the Rural Information Program, but the new system called for greater public education. The member organizations and the OCDM designed the program to employ "14,000 agricultural extension workers and county agents, 11,000 vocational agricul-

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11. FCDA, *Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1957* (Washington, DC, 1958), 51-52; FCDA, *Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1958* (Washington, DC, 1959), 33-34.

12. 1960 *Laws of Iowa*, 111-13.



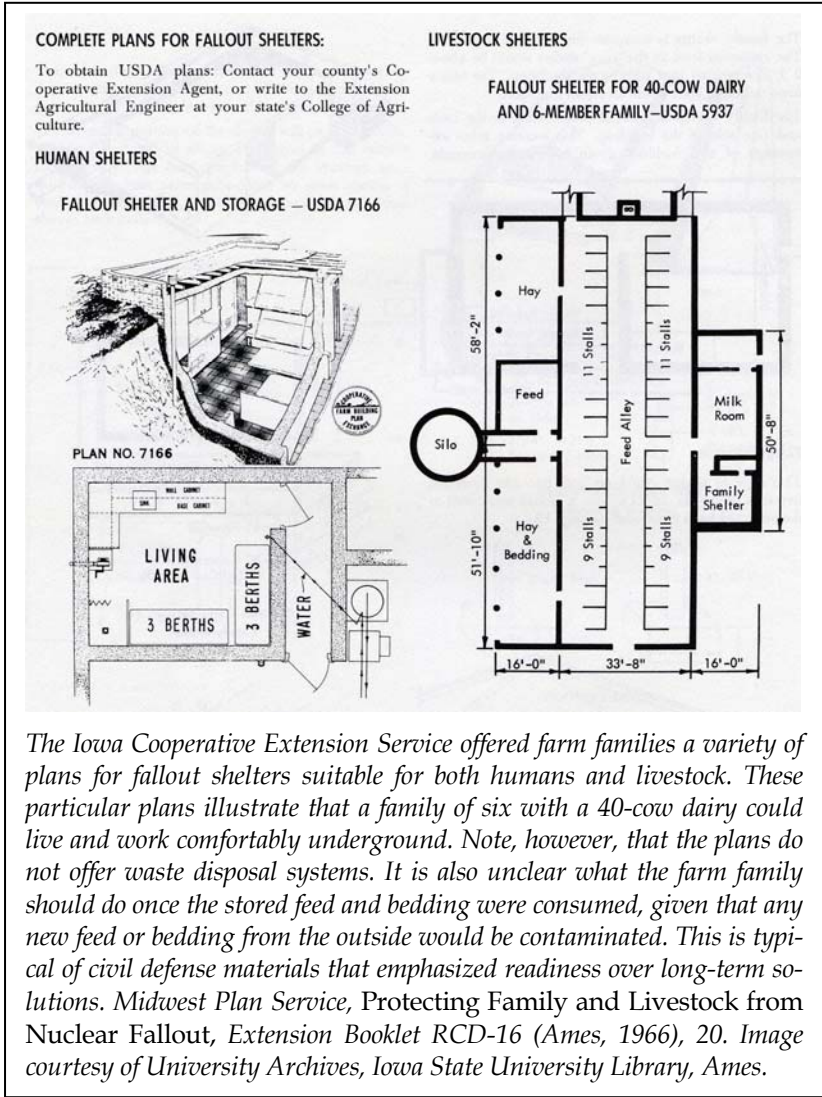
tural instructors, and the leaders of about 30,000 county and local farm organizations and 60,000 home demonstration groups" to plan activities and disseminate information. By the end of 1960, an OCDM report stated that 48 states were using the new rural civil defense program, and more than 60 percent of counties in the United States were participating.<sup>13</sup>

Over time, Americans became increasingly concerned about civil defense. Popular demand for civil defense in Iowa and across the nation reached its peak in 1961. On July 25, President Kennedy became the first president to actively encourage Americans to prepare their families and communities for nuclear war. As the Berlin Crisis unfolded and Soviet restrictions on East Berlin brought the United States to the brink of war, Kennedy, in an address to the nation, told Americans to prepare. Unlike Eisenhower, Kennedy promoted civil defense as a sound national policy, describing fallout shelters as "insurance for the civilian population." During the summer of 1961, state and local civil defense agencies reported an unprecedented number of requests from citizens for information, civil defense courses, and private fallout shelter plans. CBS News reported that whereas the OCDM formerly had received 4,000 letters per month, it now received more than twice that number each day. Iowa native Edward McDermott, deputy director of the OCDM, urged Americans to build family shelters and pleaded with lawmakers to set an example. To that end, Congress allocated \$207 million to identify, stock, and maintain buildings as public fallout shelters. By the early 1960s, then, attitudes toward civil defense had changed dramatically, and all Americans, urban and rural, received more training, education, and information than they had previously.<sup>14</sup>

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13. "Accomplishments of the Office of Civil Defense Mobilization, 1953-1960," 12/27/1960, Leo A. Hoegh Papers, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City; Executive Office of the President, Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, *Annual Report of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization for Fiscal Year 1959* (Washington, DC, 1960), 49.

14. Neil FitzSimons, "Brief History of American Civil Defense," in Eugene P. Wigner, ed., *Who Speaks for Civil Defense?* (New York, 1968), 41; Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 35-37; Transcript, CBS News, in "Office for Emergency Planning, 9/1/61-12/31/61, Executive," FG11-6, White House Central Subject Files, box 114, at [www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Fallout+Shelter.htm](http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Fallout+Shelter.htm), accessed 9/26/2006.



BETWEEN 1955 AND 1961, local leaders developed civil defense programs in a similar manner. Local and state civil defense personnel looked to federal officials for guidance and relied on federal pamphlets and films to educate their constituents. The materials produced by the FCDA and USDA were more concerned with educating rural residents about fallout and protect-

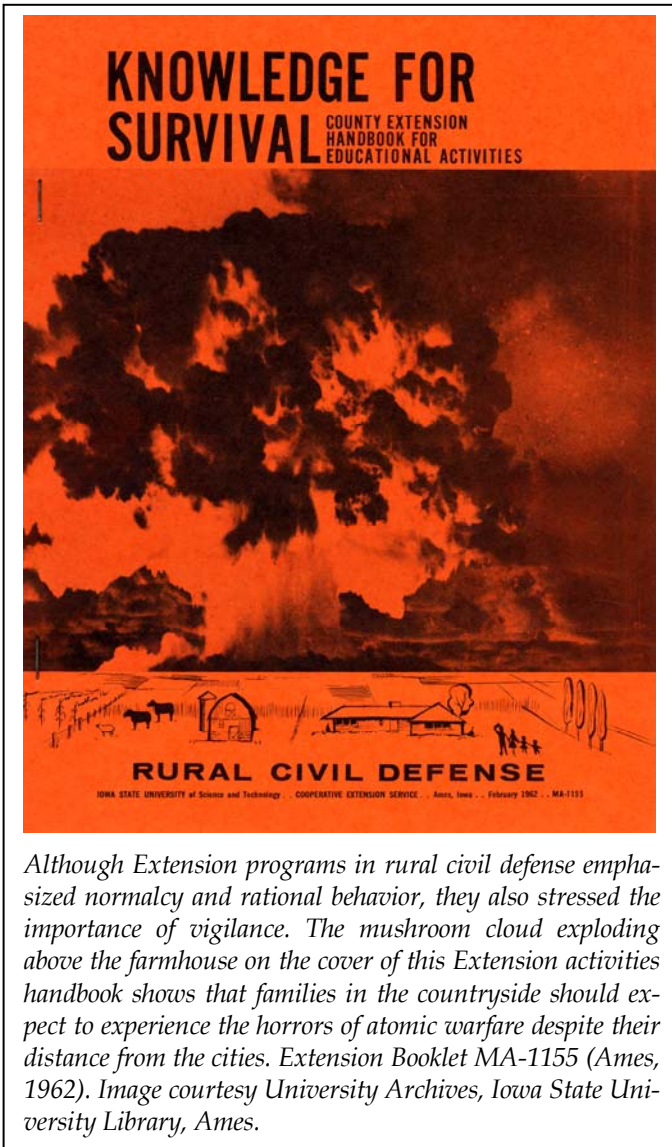
ing the nation's food supply than they were with actual destruction and loss of life. Numerous publications assured farm families that they would have hours, even days, to care for animals and seek shelter before fallout reached their farms. A 1956 FCDA brochure titled *Rural Family Defense* emphasized continuity rather than abrupt change when it reminded farmers, "The principles of civil defense are not new to rural people. You have been taking care of your own, helping your neighbors, and ready to help others—in peacetime emergencies—for a long time." Rather than isolating themselves in the event of war, the brochure urged farmers to continue to market their products and maintain sufficient stockpiles of agricultural equipment and supplies to carry on with their regular work schedules.<sup>15</sup>

In the summer of 1957 an article in *Wallaces' Farmer* assured farmers that "nobody is going to drop an atomic bomb on your pasture." "But," the article continued, "somebody might drop one on the airfield near Omaha. Then, if the wind is in the southwest, radioactive fallout might cover half of Iowa." This attitude continued through the 1960s. In 1966 radiation biologist John H. Rust dolefully concluded, "In all cases more food animals will survive than there will be men to eat them." Yet the good news, Rust believed, was that rural areas would not sustain direct nuclear hits, that nuclear conflict would be relatively brief and would not be accompanied by a prolonged war, and that it would not "seriously disrupt the ability of the . . . agricultural community to produce usable food." In general, then, the FCDA, and eventually the Extension Service, sold rural civil defense on the principles of retaining normalcy and maintaining continuity for the sake of national security. Experts touted the idea that "food will win the war." In 1962 Iowa State Extension Director R. K. Bliss assured farmers that "even the Communists admit our clear superiority in agricultural development."<sup>16</sup>

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15. FCDA, *Rural Family Defense* (Washington, DC, 1956).

16. *Defense Against Radioactive Fallout on the Farm*, USDA Farmers Bulletin 2107, quoted in *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, 7/6/1957, 18; John H. Rust, "The Agricultural Problems in Civil Defense," in *Civil Defense: A Symposium Presented at the Berkeley Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science*, Publication 82 (Washington, DC, 1966), 78, 81–82; R. K. Bliss, "Agriculture's Contribution to the National Economy," Radio Talk, 7/27/1962, R. K. Bliss Papers, Special Collections, Iowa State University Library, Ames.



*Although Extension programs in rural civil defense emphasized normalcy and rational behavior, they also stressed the importance of vigilance. The mushroom cloud exploding above the farmhouse on the cover of this Extension activities handbook shows that families in the countryside should expect to experience the horrors of atomic warfare despite their distance from the cities. Extension Booklet MA-1155 (Ames, 1962). Image courtesy University Archives, Iowa State University Library, Ames.*

Federal, state, and local governments proved hesitant to endorse or fund any extensive civil defense programs because many political leaders did not want to stir up public fears. Even after the Iowa General Assembly adopted a state plan in 1959, variations in the quality of programs continued. A 1962 Iowa

State Rural Sociology Extension survey of 66 county civil defense directors found that all but nine of them took the job simply because they had been asked by the board of county supervisors, not because they had specialized knowledge or skills. Interview subjects included 65 men and one woman, who came from 50 different occupational backgrounds, including bank president, retired farmer, barber, newspaper editor, teacher, car salesman, and housewife. Only five worked as paid, full-time directors. Whether paid or volunteer, they established county emergency plans, set up county emergency centers, preserved essential records, worked with civic groups on educational programs, wrote newspaper articles, radio speeches, and television presentations, licensed buildings as suitable shelters, and assisted communities following natural disasters.<sup>17</sup>

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, many county civil defense directors (half of those interviewed in the 1962 survey) often looked to the Extension Service for help in carrying their message to rural people. County Extension offices stocked the pamphlets, brochures, flannel graphs, filmstrips, and films, as well as the equipment that civil defense leaders needed for their talks to civic and social groups. Extension directors also served on county civil defense boards. And, in counties without civil defense directors or programs, the job often fell to Extension directors.

In keeping with national trends, Extension programs in civil defense did not emerge until the late 1950s and did not become popular on a wide scale until the early 1960s. At that time, county Extension directors and home economists received numerous requests from rural residents, often from women, to expand their educational programs on civil defense. Many rural Iowans expressed fears of Communism and nuclear war. In a 1954 *Wallaces' Farmer* poll, 77 percent of men and 81 percent of women listed the atomic age, Russia, or Communism at home and abroad as their "biggest concern." (Just 23 percent of men and 19 percent of women listed economic depression as their main concern.) One woman in Jones County who participated

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17. Gerald E. Klonglan, George M. Beal, Joe M. Bohlen, and Tim G. Shaffer, *Local Civil Defense Directors' Attitudes, Opinions, Knowledge, and Actions, 1962*, Rural Sociology Report 29 (Ames, 1964) 52, 93.

in the survey said, "It's the Communists in our midst—the ones that we don't know about—that worry me." The following year, Ella Loughran Brown, a former home demonstration agent from Sioux City, warned that Iowa farmers stood "on the brink" of Communism. Brown, pointing to the problems of agricultural surplus, feared government intervention, and she also believed that the popularity of Social Security revealed "how easily the Communists can take over a country."<sup>18</sup>

Yet there is no evidence of widespread panic about the possibility of nuclear war. Of the 66 county civil defense directors surveyed in 1962, only 29 believed it likely that "we will have another big war," while 18 gave the possibility even chances and 19 believed it to be unlikely. Of those who believed there would be a war, only about half believed it would involve nuclear weapons. In the farm press, more common was a self-assured attitude that the industrial, educational, and agricultural systems of the United States were superior to those of the Soviet Union. In the 1954 *Wallaces' Farmer* survey, a Webster County woman said, "The threat of Communism at home is practically nil. Not that they aren't a potential threat, but American people won't tolerate them." Even when the Soviets launched *Sputnik* in 1957, Dan Murphy, editor of the *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman*, wrote, "Russia has licked us with her satellite program, and she is needling us about falling behind. Yet Russia herself has been trying for 40 years since her revolution to provide her people with a pair of shoes each . . . and not doing so well."<sup>19</sup>

Rural residents were nonetheless curious about Communism and nuclear war, and it was that curiosity, not fear, that contributed to the rise of civil defense programs. Families read and heard snippets about nuclear testing in newspapers and magazines and on the radio, and they participated in existing educational programs, such as that put together by the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation Women's Committee (IFBFWC), the

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18. "What Are You Afraid Of?" *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, 9/4/1954, 38; Letter to the Editor, *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 21 (3/19/1955), 3.

19. Klonglan et al., *Local Civil Defense Directors' Attitudes*, 169; "What Are You Afraid Of?" 38; Dan B. Murphy, "Sputnik and the Hoe," *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 23 (11/23/1957), 1.

largest general farm women's organization in the state. Beginning in the 1940s, Farm Bureau women studied international politics and political systems, and in 1958 they included civil defense in their annual membership handbook. The limited 1958 program simply encouraged women to enlist their neighbors in establishing civil defense organizations, and the handbook listed numerous brochures and films that could be used for educational meetings. In 1960 the leaders of the IFBFWC stepped up their efforts and created an intensive civil defense program. The handbook that year suggested five projects: organizing communities for civil defense, home preparedness workshops, symposiums on atomic survival, first aid training, and a skit titled "Let's plan what to do now." That year, Farm Bureau women also studied "-isms," including capitalism, socialism, and Communism, as well as how to recognize "the drift to socialism and communism." Signs that democracy might be in danger included government price fixing and income supports, which, the handbook author reasoned, would lead to government ownership of farms and businesses.<sup>20</sup>

IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL that the IFBFWC should promote civil defense as part of its program, or that the Extension Service would reach out primarily to women. After all, it was mostly farm women who requested civil defense programs. Because civil defense carried undertones of welfare and family safety, and because the FCDA, and later the OCDM, emphasized "fam-

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20. "Iowa Farm Bureau Federation Women's Committee Handbook, 1958-1959" and "Iowa Farm Bureau Federation Women's Committee Handbook, 1960-1961," Iowa Farm Bureau Federation Women's Committee Records, Special Collections, Iowa State University Library, Ames (hereafter referred to as IFBFWC Records). At the annual meeting of the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation in 1959, even before the program was fully developed, members passed a resolution praising the women for instituting their civil defense program. The resolution read, "International tensions and advancement in nuclear weapons clearly indicate that our nation must maintain constant vigilance and readiness. We commend the Iowa Farm Bureau women for undertaking in 1960 an educational program in first aid for atomic survival. We urge all county Farm Bureaus and State Farm Bureau to cooperate with OCDM (Office of Civil Defense Mobilization) by carrying to all rural people the facts and information necessary for survival in the event of nuclear war." *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 26 (11/28/1959), 18.

ily preparedness," civil defense quickly became "women's business." This was deliberate, as evidenced by numerous FCDA pamphlets titled *Women and Civil Defense* and by the fact that in 1953 the FCDA established a women's division to work closely with women's groups in creating information networks. That led to what historian Laura McEnaney has called "atomic housewifery," as women were deemed most fit to deal with emergencies because they would only need to modify their normal domestic duties.<sup>21</sup>

Members of rural women's organizations easily integrated civil defense programs into their agendas because they were already accustomed to discussing political topics and making public displays. By 1950, state officers in the IFBFWC had devised a system to instruct rural women on a variety of social, political, and economic issues. Every year, county and township organizations would elect women to be chairpersons for particular issues, including international affairs, taxation, health, and soil conservation. The chairperson learned all she could on her particular topic and then reported back to the other members. Beginning in the late 1950s, many county and township Farm Bureau women's organizations began electing Civil Defense chairpersons. These women usually distributed pamphlets or invited the county civil defense director to speak.

Civil Defense chairpersons also assisted Extension Home Economists in planning general interest meetings and civil defense exhibits for county fairs. In 1959 the women of the East Pottawattamie County Family Living Committee sponsored a talk by Frank Miles, public relations consultant for the OCDM, followed by a tour of nearby Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue, Nebraska. On the opposite side of the state, the Lee County Family Living Committee held a civil defense training school for 21 local leaders, where "there was much interested discussion" following a presentation on fallout. The local leaders then held follow-up sessions on the township level, where they reached 214 more people. Later that same year, the Family Living Committee sponsored a civil defense booth at the Lee County Fair, where women displayed mock fallout shelters com-

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21. Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 88, 108.



plete with the food and supplies necessary for a two-week stay. In 1960 a similar booth appeared at the neighboring Des Moines County Fair. In both cases, the booths stirred little controversy and evoked "positive comments" from fairgoers. In Page County, the Farm Bureau women held a Civil Defense Day, where they discussed how schools, hospitals, and private homes could be used as fallout shelters for locals as well as urban refugees. Although the event was poorly attended due to poor weather, Page County women heard speakers, including the county civil defense director, studied maps to estimate fallout areas, and viewed films on the supposed aftermath of nuclear war.<sup>22</sup>

In 1961, a year when civil defense programs became increasingly widespread across the nation, the Iowa State Extension Service experienced a surge in activities, with more counties establishing civil defense programs and holding informational meetings. Often, women's clubs simply integrated civil defense into their normal activities. The women of the Freedom Township Women's Club, an organization associated with the Farm Bureau in Palo Alto County, studied "First Aid in the Space Age" and chose to construct a civil defense exhibit for the county Rural Women's Day. They reasoned that an understanding of first aid would not only make them better able to care for urban refugees but would also have immediate benefits on the farm. That same year, Van Buren County Home Economist Edna C. Morris used a lesson on the increasingly popular cooking method of barbecue to teach about food preparation in times of disaster. After she discussed the elements of a "survival diet," she had women dig small pits where they set fires to cook meats and vegetables. Morris found that the lesson was successful in teaching emergency food preparation: "The comment was commonly expressed, 'It sure doesn't take much of this to satisfy.'" <sup>23</sup>

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22. "East Pottawattamie County," *ANR* (1959), 9; "Lee County," *ANR* (1959), 13; *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 26 (8/27/1960), 5; "FB Women Hold Civil Defense Day," *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 26 (3/5/1960), 18. Because of its large size and population, Pottawattamie County had two separate county Extension offices. Each district—East and West—maintained its own offices and administrative staff.

23. 1961 Scrapbook, Records of Freedom Township Women's Club, Palo Alto County, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City; "Van Buren County," *ANR* (1961), 15.

The year 1961 also saw increased activities for a wider variety of community organizations, as well as cooperation between various groups. In Grundy County, Extension workers coordinated their efforts with those of the civil defense director, law enforcement officials, the USDA emergency planning committee, and farm organizations. Extension directors received requests for informational materials and presentations from junior high and high schools, garden clubs, businesses, adult education programs, church groups, and civic groups, such as Lions Clubs and Jaycees. Washington County Extension Director James R. Frier reported, "The cold war continues to keep tensions high and interest in civil defense caused some concern." That year, the Family Living Committee, along with the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary, the American Legion Auxiliary, the Soil Conservation Service, and the civil defense director, set up a booth at the county fair, where they handed out more than 2,000 pamphlets on home shelter construction.<sup>24</sup>

BY THE EARLY 1960s, civil defense was no longer just "women's work." Women were not necessarily expected to participate in leadership positions or in the scientific, technical, and administrative aspects of civil defense. At the 1961 Wright County Fair, for example, the Family Living Committee sponsored a booth on fallout shelters, while "civil defense authorities" sponsored an adjoining tent on emergency communication networks. County supervisors most often asked men to serve as county civil defense directors, regardless of their occupation. And when it came to establishing and coordinating emergency plans and communication networks, male Extension agents were more likely to turn to other men. For example, in 1961, Plymouth County Extension Director Arlie A. Pierson, conducted a civil defense drill along with workers from the Stabilization and Conservation Service, the Farm and Home Administration (FHA), and the Soil Conservation Service. The drill lasted for four hours, as the men set up emergency headquarters in the basement of the Extension Office and tested the Conelrad com-

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24. FitzSimons, "Brief History of American Civil Defense," 41; "Washington County," *ANR* (1961), 9.

munication system. They found it lacking and difficult to read, however, and decided that they preferred to use two-way radios to communicate with civil defense officials.<sup>25</sup>

Programs aimed at men spoke less of family preparedness and more of nuclear science. A 1960 USDA booklet, *Radioactive Fallout in Time of Emergency: Effects upon Agriculture*, and the 1961 USDA *Radiological Training Manual* featured scientific diagrams and detailed illustrations of atoms, mushroom clouds, fallout patterns, and protective measures that did not appear in the more “family oriented” materials. These practical manuals usually began by explaining the nature of the atom and the science behind nuclear weapons. County agents and farmers also learned how to protect valuable equipment, properly shelter animals, and determine safe work schedules in areas covered by fallout. The books contained diagrams of barns and homes protected from fallout using concrete, dirt, or even hay bales and tarpaulins. The books also instructed men on how to measure radiation levels using Geiger counters and how to use those measurements to test plants and soils and manage livestock grazing in open pastures. These scientific and technical manuals offered many simplified explanations of radiation and atomic energy, but the writers of such books did not necessarily imply that a general audience would understand the contents. A 1966 instructor’s manual for a Rural Fallout Shelter Analysis Workshop sponsored by the OCDM and USDA indicated that the workshop was designed for county agents and others with scientific backgrounds, but “a trial presentation demonstrated that women with an interest in Civil Defense and who have a technical bent are able to comprehend the procedure *with a little effort*” (emphasis added).<sup>26</sup>

In addition to focusing on the scientific aspects of rural civil defense, men also tended to make it a political rather than a domestic issue. In 1963 Al Hagen, secretary of the American Dairy Association of Iowa, chided federal agencies for releasing

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25. “Wright County,” ANR (1961), 9; “Plymouth County,” ANR (1961), 8.

26. Agricultural Research Service, *Radioactive Fallout in Time of Emergency: Effects Upon Agriculture* (Washington, DC, 1960); Agricultural Research Service, *USDA Radiological Training Manual* (Washington, DC, 1961); and *Rural Fallout Shelter Analysis Workshop* [instructor manual] (Washington, DC, 1966), 65.

information about using milk as an index to measure the radioactive isotope strontium-90. By the late 1950s, researchers had found elevated levels of strontium-90 in milk, which they attributed to fallout from atmospheric testing. Yet because the federal agencies did not fully explain why milk served as a good indicator, Hagen argued, they misled the public into believing that milk would be the only commodity affected by fallout. Likewise, American Farm Bureau President Charles B. Schuman favored federal programs to keep agricultural surpluses "for the purpose of defense." Because Russia had "trouble feeding its population," he believed a large surplus would give the United States an edge and would serve as one more deterrent to the Soviets. At the same time, however, Schuman feared that emergency food storage programs would be financed through the existing agricultural budget, which he believed to be strained already, so he asked that they be financed with civil defense funds instead.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the gendered implications of much of these materials and activities, the Extension Service did not have separate, male-oriented civil defense programs, nor did it attempt to integrate civil defense into its agricultural programs. Any information directed at farmers emphasized work and business and reinforced normalcy. One 1962 article in the *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* began, "Three out of four farms wouldn't get enough fallout to keep operators inside more than one day."<sup>28</sup>

In many ways, civil defense was a family issue that brought both men and women to informational meetings where they could learn general facts and begin to understand the realities of nuclear war. Overall, between 1959 and 1962, Extension staff found attendance at civil defense events to be comparable with that at other Extension programs. In 1960 Ringgold County Extension Director Verdon W. Payne reported that 48 men and women had attended an open meeting on civil defense where Iowa State Director of Civil Defense C. E. "Ben" Fowler explained the importance of fallout shelters. According to Payne,

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27. "Milk Measures Fallout," *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 27 (12/30/1963), 4; "Civil Defense Storage," *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 29 (12/1/1962), 4.

28. "Radioactive Fallout in Time of Emergency," *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 28 (3/24/1962), 4.

an audience of 48 was "about average for this county this year for attendance of programs." In 1961 the Winneshiek County Extension home economist reported that 357 homemakers had participated in civil defense programs, and she estimated that information had reached 352 farm homes, 35 rural nonfarm homes, and 17 urban homes. That same year, 61 men and women attended an open meeting in Wayne County, although the Extension director could not find any "concrete evidence of shelters built."<sup>29</sup>

Civil defense programs were not limited to rural residents of means or social influence. In 1961 the federal government designated Appanoose County, beleaguered by poverty and underemployment, as a Redevelopment Area. Extension programs there emphasized economic development, yet Home Demonstration Agent Inga O. Eddy still reported that "homemakers in our county have heard about the dangers to our people from atomic fallout" and wanted to know more about food, water, and equipment preservation. At one civil defense meeting, Appanoose County women studied a model of a fallout shelter and discussed the county's needs and "how the information on civil defense could be carried to the different parts of the county most effectively." Such discussions may have been a means to aid in developing this relatively isolated and largely rural county, because civil defense activities tended to bring various groups together and to open doors of communication between urban and rural residents.<sup>30</sup>

IN CONTRAST to the reaction to President Kennedy's call for public preparedness in 1961, the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 did not appear to significantly increase demand for civil defense programs from the Extension Service. In 1962 and 1963 only 31 of the 66 county civil defense directors interviewed stated that the missile crisis affected how many hours per week they devoted to their work, with a mean increase of 13 hours per week. Yet it is not clear from the sources used in this study

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29. "Ringgold County," *ANR* (1960), 25; "Winneshiek County," *ANR* (1961), 54; "Wayne County," *ANR* (1961), 15.

30. "Appanoose County," *ANR* (1961), 14; "Van Buren County," *ANR* (1961), 4.

whether the cause of the increase was that county directors attended more meetings and training sessions, gave more talks, helped more families and towns build shelters, or some combination of factors. Extension directors did not mention the missile crisis in their annual reports for 1962, and the farm press had very little to say about the event. *Wallaces' Farmer*, for example, did not run an article related to the Cuban missile crisis until November 17, 1962, when it featured an article titled "In Case of War—USDA Has Plans." The article detailed USDA plans to halt sales of farm equipment and fertilizers and store grains and foodstuffs. Most significant was the establishment of county USDA Defense Boards. Armed with operating instructions for possible scenarios (such as "stepped up danger," "limited war," "imminent attack," and "actual attack") these boards were responsible for educating and preparing farmers. The article in *Wallaces' Farmer* pointed out that the missile crisis had "pin-pointed weak spots in existing farm civil defense," which "are now being strengthened." Such strengthening seemed to come in the form of replicating educational programs already in place.<sup>31</sup>

Despite requests from constituents for information and meetings on civil defense, doubts still lingered in the minds of home economists and Extension directors that such programs were worthwhile. For example, Van Buren County Extension Director Melvin L. Powers expressed concerns that rural residents did not take the information seriously and that they "lack the knowledge and fail to realize that radioactive fallout can cover thousands of square miles." In some counties, Extension sponsored absolutely no civil defense activities that year. Surprisingly, neither West Pottawattamie nor Mills counties, located just across the Missouri River from Offutt Air Force Base, both with active Family Living Committees, chose civil defense for their annual programs.

There is only sparse evidence to show how rural residents responded to civil defense programs—whether they took the information seriously, built shelters, or even feared nuclear attack. Of the 66 county civil defense directors surveyed by the Rural Sociology Extension, 96 percent of whom believed that

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31. Klonglan et al., *Local Civil Defense Directors' Attitudes*, 81; "In Case of War—USDA Has Plans," *Wallaces' Farmer*, 11/17/1962, 21.

their areas would receive fallout from a nuclear attack, 53 stated that they had taken steps to protect their families against fallout and 38 had actually designated a fallout area, while 10 said that they had "never seriously considered the need for protection." When asked to complete the sentence, "A person who builds a family fallout shelter is . . .", one county director answered, "a fool." Fifty-one of the directors believed that some families in their areas had built emergency shelters, though they presented no evidence to support their belief and the exact numbers proved unreliable. Furthermore, the survey did not differentiate between shelters built for the express purpose of fallout protection and those built for safety during natural disasters, or both.<sup>32</sup>

A more telling part of the survey was when the county civil defense directors completed the following sentence: "As far as civil defense is concerned, the average citizen is . . .". Only two answered "somewhat interested," while the remaining 64 answered "apathetic," "complacent," "ignorant," "lax," "not educated," or even "stupid." But even this does not give a clear picture of popular attitudes toward rural civil defense. The county civil defense directors tended to be elite or influential residents who did not necessarily connect to all of the people in their counties, and some of them did not even want the job of civil defense director. Many simply took the job because they had been asked and they felt a duty to serve their communities. Their opinions, then, are not necessarily representative of all rural Iowans, though they do indicate that most of their constituents did not consistently and enthusiastically engage in civil defense preparations.<sup>33</sup>

Another 1962 Iowa State Rural Sociology Extension survey of Franklin County residents, titled "Community Power Structure and Civil Defense," provides the most complete data measuring general attitudes toward rural civil defense in Iowa. Franklin County, the site of the 21-booth civil defense fair mentioned in the introduction, the "first of its kind organized and carried out in this region of the country," was chosen for the study because its civil defense fair was unique, thorough, and

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32. Klonglan et al., *Local Civil Defense Directors' Attitudes*, 185.

33. *Ibid.*, 67, 163, 181, 185.

well attended, and also because its planning required considerable cooperation between individuals and organizations and urban and rural residents. The data from the sociological survey is especially useful for this study because researchers identified 25 individuals as “influentials” and compared their answers to a random sample of 163 individuals taken in the same county. Because researchers used many of the same questions in this study as they had for the survey of county extension directors, the answers also allow for a second comparison between the directors and the random sample.<sup>34</sup>

Franklin County proved to be an ideal location for examining rural civil defense. Located in north central Iowa, in 1960 it had 1,885 farms and a population of 15,472. Hampton, the largest town and county seat, boasted approximately 4,500 residents. And at 95 miles from Des Moines, 193 miles from Davenport, and 225 miles from Omaha, it stood a fair chance of receiving fallout in the event of nuclear attack. Hampton also played an important role in the national civil defense network because it was home to an 85,000-square-foot warehouse that served as an OCDM Radiological Instrument Maintenance Shop. Constructed just a few blocks from the city center in 1955, the facility, one of twelve similar warehouses located throughout the country, stored items such as Geiger counters, electrometers, and dosimeters used to measure levels of radiation. Maintenance shop staff provided equipment, service, and training to a region comprising Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, North and South Dakota, Wyoming, and Colorado. Surprisingly, none of the sociological or Extension materials mentioned the Radiological Instrument Maintenance Shop or any of its employees as having participated in local civil defense activities.<sup>35</sup>

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34. So-called “influentials” included a banker, a grocery store owner, a county judge, the president of a seed corn company, a “housewife” who that year chaired the IFBFWC, a newspaper publisher, a radio station manager, and an attorney. Most were affiliated with the Republican Party.

35. *Hampton Times*, 11/21/1961. In 1953 the FCDA declared Davenport, Iowa, and Omaha, Nebraska, as “critical target areas”; Franklin County stood midway between those two cities. FCDA, *Target Areas for Civil Defense Purposes: Their Population, Principal Cities, and Counties* (Washington, DC, 1953), 1; <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/censusbin/census/cen.pl>, accessed 10/26/2003; FCDA, *Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1955* (Washington, DC, 1956),



Civil defense first appeared in Franklin County annual Extension reports in 1960, when, in keeping with the statewide program, the Franklin County FBFWC chose to emphasize civil defense in its annual program. Before that time, Franklin County Extension Director R. Pearl Kelsey had indicated that rural residents were more concerned with commodity prices, juvenile delinquency, and the collective bargaining activities of the National Farm Organization. He also claimed that the county had a weak Family Living Committee; in 1958 he wrote that the committee struggled to increase attendance by hosting more open meetings and promoting its activities with better publicity. One way to do that was to incorporate civil defense, a topic that "rated at the top of the list for family program recommendations," into Family Living activities.<sup>36</sup>

In 1961 Kelsey approached County Extension Home Economist Aleen Thompson and members of the Family Living Committee with the idea to arrange a countywide exhibit on civil defense. Kelsey hoped the extensive exhibit would compensate for the "piece meal work that had been done in the county on civil defense education and newspaper and magazine publicity with often conflicting statements regarding the dangers of radioactive fallout." At the outset, he wanted to keep the exhibits "on the positive side," to inform people how they could prepare their families for fallout efficiently and cheaply. To that end, Kelsey wanted volunteer participants to demonstrate makeshift basement shelters, and he did not allow exhibits of commercial fallout shelters or other commercial products.<sup>37</sup>

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31-33; Agricultural Research Service, *USDA Radiological Training Manual* (Washington, DC, 1961), 79-83.

36. "Franklin County," *ANR* (1958), 64; "Franklin County," *ANR* (1960), 97.

37. "Franklin County," *ANR* (1962), 28. During the 1950s and 1960s, civil defense fairs and exhibits were commonly used to educate the public. For example, in the summer of 1954, the city of Chicago, Cook County, and the FCDA sponsored a civil defense exhibit at Chicago's Riverview Park in a new building erected specifically to house the exhibit. Each Sunday, the exhibit featured a live program, some of which were partially broadcast, and some were recorded for use on the Voice of America radio broadcasts. Average Sunday attendance was 4,000, and although exhibit planners kept no official records of attendance, they estimated that several hundred thousand people saw the exhibit, with peak daily attendance reaching more than 10,000. FCDA, *Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1954* (Washington, DC, 1955).

Initially, however, finding community and volunteer support proved difficult. In September 1961, just two months before the exhibit, Extension personnel hosted an informational meeting, inviting representatives from 57 different women's clubs in Franklin County and the surrounding area. Only 19 clubs responded by sending representatives, and only two organizations, the Farm Bureau Women's Committee and the Hampton Women's Society of Christian Service, committed their services to promoting the fair. A few weeks later, Extension personnel hosted a second informational meeting for representatives from a variety of social, civic, and voluntary organizations. Kelsey and Thompson eventually garnered the help of 41 organizations. The Hampton High School Science Club, for example, sponsored a booth on "What Happens in a Nuclear Explosion," and the Hampton Catholic Women hosted "Recreation in the Shelter." The Homemakers 4-H club sponsored a booth titled "Shelter Models: Shelter Ventilation, Light, and Heat," and the Hampton Garden Club adopted an appropriate booth: "Fallout on Garden Vegetables and Fruits." Other organizations contributed time, money, and human resources even if they did not sponsor booths.<sup>38</sup>

The exhibit ran for one weekend, November 17 and 18, 1961, and attracted 2,600 individuals, many of whom were also participating in National Farm-City Week activities taking place nearby. The exhibit was free and open to the public between 1 p.m. and 9 p.m. each day, running for a total of 16 hours. An average tour of the exhibit took an hour, and 92 percent of all attendees saw all 21 booths. Adults over the age of 15 made up 71 percent of the attendees, with 58 percent over the age of 35. More women than men attended the exhibit, and three-fourths of the attendees had relatives or friends involved with executing the exhibit. Because of their close connection with participants, it is not surprising that most people held favorable attitudes toward civil defense before attending the exhibit. One attendee, however, told Extension staff, "I had not planned to attend because I just don't like to think about such things, but a friend

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38. "Franklin County," *ANR* (1962), 28, 30; Beal et al., *Social Action in Civil Defense*, 13-14, 18-25.

asked me to come and I am real pleased that I did because I am convinced that people need to have more information about these things and I plan to do something about protection at home." The only negative comments Kelsey recorded related to people who believed that nuclear war would be so devastating that "they weren't so sure they would want to survive."<sup>39</sup>

With a large number of compliments in hand, Kelsey declared the exhibit a success. Although he was convinced that the project represented an "effective kind of educational job," he also recognized its social and organizational benefits. He lauded the efforts of the many groups and individuals who participated. "The key to the success of the program," he wrote, "was teamwork." Clearly, Kelsey and Thompson wanted to raise interest in Extension programs and jumpstart the Franklin County Family Living Committee. Offering the people of the county a large project galvanized relationships between organizations and provided a common activity across the county. "This program," the *Hampton Times* reported, "is an outstanding example of what can be done by farm and city people working together." In fact, the exhibit attracted people from outside Franklin County. Five of the eight surrounding counties had minor civil defense programs that mostly included staff training sessions and the distribution of pamphlets to local families, so the Franklin County exhibit was definitely a novelty in the area. By that time, the FCDA and organizations such as the IFBFWC had promoted civil defense exhibits and public education programs, but an exhibit of this size and scope was unique in Iowa.<sup>40</sup>

The exhibit and its galvanizing effects did not appear to last, however, and it did not drastically change existing attitudes. Fourteen months after the exhibit, none of the attendees had constructed a family fallout shelter. In the Rural Sociology Extension follow-up survey, 64 percent of Franklin County in-

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39. Beal et al., *Social Action in Civil Defense*, 28; "Franklin County," *ANR* (1962), 29.

40. "Franklin County," *ANR* (1962), 30; *Hampton Times*, 11/14/1961. The surrounding counties are Butler, Cerro Gordo, Floyd, Grundy, Hamilton, Hancock, Hardin, and Wright. Information on civil defense activities in those counties may be found in their respective *Annual Narrative Reports* for 1960, 1961, and 1962.



fluent respondents and 68 percent of random respondents believed that fallout would hit their communities, yet none had even considered building a fallout shelter, and 28 percent and 22 percent, respectively, had "never seriously considered the need for protection." Most of those surveyed believed they had adequate knowledge of civil defense preparedness and did not believe that more programs were needed in their local communities. More than 80 percent of all respondents had no knowledge of recent civil defense activities in their local area in the months following the exhibit, and few people reported knowledge of existing fallout shelters. Less than 30 percent of respondents indicated that they had received information either directly from the Extension Service or from the informational kit assembled by the Extension director. Newspapers, magazines, and "communication with personal friends, relatives, and neighbors" served as individuals' primary sources of information about civil defense. Influential respondents were more likely to have attended the exhibit, to have heard about civil defense through an organization, and to have read civil defense publications, while

random respondents were more likely to have relied on television and radio.<sup>41</sup>

Few of the individuals surveyed participated in civil defense activities on a regular basis. Only one-fourth of the influential respondents had worked in the area of civil defense, discussed civil defense at work, or received any training on the subject. Fear of Communism had not spurred citizens to action because 88 percent of influential respondents and 58 percent of random respondents disagreed with the statement, "A thermonuclear war would mean the end of democracy as a political system." The difference arose mostly because 19 percent of random respondents were undecided on the question, while the influential respondents held firm opinions. Most people agreed with civil defense in principle but faltered when it came to practice.<sup>42</sup>

Only about 20 percent of all respondents agreed with the statement, "Civil defense activities are nothing but a waste of money and human energy that could better be spent on waging peace, such as disarmament talks." Yet the influential respondents tended to discourage the use of tax revenues to establish a public shelter system. When asked to choose their most favored shelter program, 40 percent of influential respondents chose "a program that encourages construction of individual family shelters," whereas 55 percent of random respondents chose public shelter programs. Overall, the survey shows that rural people generally supported civil defense programs, but were not necessarily willing to participate either in civic activities or in building family and public fallout shelters. Many viewed shelters as a type of "insurance," but that is far from the hysteria often associated with Cold War America.<sup>43</sup>

The Franklin County Extension Service, like the FCDA, OCDM, and many state agencies, set out to help people "to think calmly regarding what they would need to know in case of radio active fallout," and it did just that. Yet the Rural Sociology Extension survey found that attitude changes among those

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41. Joe M. Bohlen, George M. Beal, Gerald E. Klonglan, and John L. Tait, *Community Power Structure and Civil Defense*, Rural Sociology Report No. 35 (Ames, 1964), 31, 70, 197, 217, 218, 223, 228.

42. *Ibid.*, 234, 199.

43. *Ibid.*, 205, 211.

who attended the Franklin County civil defense fair “were small, showing a movement from a position *fairly* favorable to civil defense to a position *very* favorable toward civil defense” (emphasis added). There is no evidence, however, that the fair spurred a flurry of civil defense activities in the community. In fact, the primary headline in the *Hampton Times* the following week informed readers that Hampton’s main street would switch from diagonal to parallel parking for a trial period. And over the next several months, the newspaper made no mention of community civil defense activities. The issue was not entirely dead, though. The next year, in 1962, the *Hampton Times* reported that county officials still wanted a better county civil defense program. They sought to “create a nucleus of an informed leadership group to support policies and practices on all levels” and to provide a base for “future public education” by participating in a civil defense educational program not through the Extension Service but through the State Department of Public Instruction. The 15-hour course trained 16 instructors, one from each township, in civil defense information, survival, and modern warfare. Yet again, a survey of the *Hampton Times* in the following months reveals little about whether this program proved successful or popular.<sup>44</sup>

BY THE MID-1960s, general interest in civil defense had declined across the country. Cold War tensions eased considerably in 1963 when the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Signed by President Kennedy in October 1963, the treaty prohibited nuclear testing in the atmosphere, at sea, and in outer space, putting to rest fears of radioactive contaminants lingering in the atmosphere. That year members of Congress voted to withdraw funding from programs to survey and stock public fallout shelters. Suddenly, references to atomic power disappeared from popular discourse. In reality, the threat of nuclear war was still present. The United States actually tested more nuclear weapons in the years following the Limited Test Ban Treaty than it had in the preceding years. Yet

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44. “Franklin County,” *ANR* (1962), 29; Beal et al., *Social Action in Civil Defense*, 30; *Hampton Times*, 11/28/1961, 11/20/1962.

in the minds of many Americans, the treaty hailed a new era of cooperation between the superpowers, and because the agreement banned atmospheric testing, Americans lost their sense of urgency in curbing the arms race and preparing for nuclear war. The public had also turned its attention to the growing conflict in Vietnam. As historian Paul Boyer has noted, "the bomb was a political menace; Vietnam was actuality" that demanded immediate action. Reflecting this shift, in 1966 members of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) voted to drop their focus on atomic weapons and instead support efforts to end the Vietnam War. Finally, the civil rights movement and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs redirected the attention of many Americans to solving social, political, and economic inequalities that existed across the country. And like the Vietnam War, those problems, as well as the ensuing violence, protests, and assassinations, were tangible, immediate problems in the lives of many Americans.<sup>45</sup>

People in Iowa seemed to join the rest of the nation in putting their fears of nuclear war to rest by the mid-1960s. The issue was no longer present in Extension programming; in 1963 the only activities related to civil defense in Franklin County that Kelsey mentioned had to do with assisting the Rural Sociology Extension with its surveys on civil defense and community power structures. The Family Living Committee abandoned civil defense and shifted its program to encompass low calorie diets, the family wardrobe, legal matters, and "family centered" kitchens. After having complained of weak programs and poor attendance in the late 1950s, County Home Economist Aleen Thompson finally reported in 1963, "A strong committee guided the Family Living Program this year. The type of activities were timely and of interest to all. Participation in committee sponsored events proved that people in Franklin County have maintained interest and enthusiasm for the Family Living Program." Whether the civil defense exhibit helped to strengthen the Family Living Committee is uncertain, but it was a large project that required considerable participation and dedication, which may

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45. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 358-59.

have inspired some fledgling members to participate on a more regular basis.<sup>46</sup>

By 1964, Kelsey was still serving as director, but none of the Franklin County Extension staff mentioned civil defense in the annual report, and the topic was entirely absent from Extension's long-running public policy lecture series, which addressed a variety of social, political, and economic issues for families. Rather than reflecting a lack of interest, however, the decline of civil defense programs in Franklin County, and in much of Iowa, was due to the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) in 1964, which funded rural anti-poverty programs. In 1965 Franklin County again focused its public policy lecture series on economic development, while the Extension Service in several other counties initiated anti-poverty and vocational training programs. In Plymouth County, where there had been a strong civil defense program between 1956 and 1963 under Extension Director Arlie A. Pierson, in 1965, the new director, Lyle Mackey, ended civil defense programs and put considerable effort into holding public information meetings on the EOA that he hoped would create interest in EOA programs. He also helped organize the Plymouth County Economic Opportunity Act Board to coordinate activities across the county and across the state.<sup>47</sup>

Civil defense programs resurfaced briefly in the late 1960s, but they bore little resemblance to the popular, well-attended events of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1966 R. Pearl Kelsey reported, "the county civil defense program has been very loosely organized," and all of its efforts went not into education but into coordinating efforts with the USDA Defense Board and complying with state requirements. The following year, Kelsey met regularly with the County Technical Action Panel, a group formed to handle natural disasters and civil defense, but since Franklin County had lost its civil defense director, it was ineligible for federal and state funds, as well as assistance in developing civil defense programs.<sup>48</sup>

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46. J. Walsh, "Civil Defense," *Science* 140 (4/19/1963), 283-84; "Franklin County," *ANR* (1963), 14.

47. "Plymouth County," *ANR* (1965), 31.

48. "Franklin County," *ANR* (1966), 43; "Franklin County," *ANR* (1967), 44.



By 1968, there was so little demand for rural civil defense programs that the Federal Cooperative Extension Service, working under contract with the OCDM, withdrew funding from the Rural Civil Defense Education Program. National leaders encouraged state and local Extension personnel to incorporate any existing civil defense materials into 4-H and home economics activities, and suggested fun, inexpensive family events such as an "Emergency Preparedness Week" and an "Atomic Easter Egg Hunt." That year, Franklin County had a new civil defense director, Don Patten, who worked with 4-H leaders to conduct a survey on local families' preparedness for disasters. It was part of a greater, statewide project to form "4-H T.V. Action Clubs." The program supposedly enrolled more than 50,000 young people to watch ten half-hour weekly television programs on emergencies and civil defense. That civil defense should be denied funding and relegated to 4-H illustrates that the issue was no longer a primary concern among adults, and protecting one's family was no longer a popular or relevant topic in either the home economics or agricultural programs.<sup>49</sup>

Women's organizations that had been so essential to the success of civil defense programs still emphasized the importance of international relations, but by the late 1960s members had turned their attention to civil disobedience and the problem of youth rebellion. Many members of the IFBFWC expressed their dismay at the behavior of students and other young people involved in the budding counterculture. The women stepped up patriotic activities, using their experiences as mothers and members of families to justify their authority over discontented youth. They addressed war protests, as well as crime, juvenile delinquency, and drug use. As part of their campaign to instill law, order, and morality into the lives of Iowa's youth, Farm Bureau women spoke out against violence on television and in films. They also reflected on how they might reach out to young people. Mrs. Edwin Thiemann of Hancock County urged parents and children alike to "forget the generation gap idea" and

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49. Federal Extension Service, USDA, *Rural Civil Defense Education Program, Report for Fiscal Year 1968* (Washington, DC, 1969), 1-30; "Franklin County," *ANR* (1968), 6; "Extension Workers Provide Rural Iowans with Civil Defense Advice," *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 35 (5/11/1968), 19.

reopen lines of communication. She warned adults to first consider how they have set an example before passing judgment, and she asked young people to "forgive" the mistakes of the older generation.<sup>50</sup>

THE EXTENT to which the Extension Service participated in county civil defense programs depended on the attitude of the Extension director as well as the demand from rural constituents. Yet even during the 1960s, when popular demand spurred the creation of civil defense programs, they were short lived and more often served as a means to unite communities around a common concern. The available evidence suggests that most rural Iowans did not take precautions against fallout, prepare to take in urban refugees, or build shelters in their homes. They simply did not believe it to be necessary, partly because Extension programs took a practical approach to civil defense that did not incite panic. Instead, such programs began with basic information about atomic structure and extended as far as farm and home defense, with a particular emphasis on fallout. Rather than addressing destruction, rural civil defense accentuated the possibilities for normalcy that existed even in a state of war. As the decade of the 1960s wore on, however, rural Iowans, like most Americans, refocused their energies on the Economic Opportunity Act, as well as youth rebellion. Interest in civil defense had proven fleeting, with rural Iowans acting in accordance with the majority of Americans, leaving their curiosity behind once the threat of nuclear war no longer seemed imminent.

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50. *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 35 (7/12/1969), 18; Mrs. Walter Eller, "Building Respect for Law Is Community Need," *ibid.* 35 (11/22/1969), 10; Mrs. Edwin Thiemann, "You Have to Listen to Communicate," *ibid.* 35 (7/26/1969), 4; *Iowa Farm Bureau Women's Committee Handbook (1970-1971)*, IFBFWC Records. Mrs. Reinhard Riessen, District Three Committeewoman, encouraged farm women to take comfort in the fact that "rural areas have not shown the sharp spiral among the very young that urban areas have seen." Mrs. Reinhard Riessen, "A Look at Youth and Civil Order," *Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman* 34 (7/1/1967), 12. See also Mrs. Walter Heuer, "Urge FB Women to Teach Patriotism to Children," *ibid.* 33 (3/12/1966), 10; Mrs. Louis Peterson, "Preparation and Training of Young Adults Is Reflected in Their Actions and Attitudes," *ibid.* 35 (8/31/1968), 12.