

Developing and Sustaining Rural Senior Cooperative Housing

Research Report

Cooperative Development Foundation, 2001



United States Department of Agriculture RBS 99-12

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Developing and Sustaining Rural Senior Cooperative Housing Development
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**editor's note-may add names from people attending September 20th meeting in MN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|--------|
| Acknowledgements & Credits | 2 |
| Table of Contents | 3 |
| Index of Graphs and Tables | 4 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| Report on Key Informant Survey and Interviews | 7 |
| I. Introduction | 9 |
| II. Highlights of Findings | 9 |
| III. Who Were the Respondents? | 16 |
| IV. Homestead Housing Center Findings | 19 |
| Report on Homestead Resident Survey | 21 |
| I. Introduction | 23 |
| II. Purpose and Objectives | 23 |
| III. Significance | 24 |
| IV. Questionnaire | 25 |
| V. Mail Survey | 25 |
| VI. Findings | 25 |
| A. Objective 1 | 26 |
| <i>Identify the Reasons Why Older Adults Choose to Move to Cooperative Housing</i> | |
| B. Objective 2 | 30 |
| <i>Describe the Effects Living in Rural Cooperative Housing Has Had on Older Adults</i> | |
| C. Objective 3 | 31 |
| <i>Describe the Personal Characteristics of Older Adults Living in Rural Cooperative Housing</i> | |
| D. Objective 4 | 34 |
| <i>Determine the Quality of Life of the Homestead Residents</i> | |
| VII. Comparison of Studies on Homestead Living | 36 |
| VIII. Summary | 36 |
| Appendix A: Key Informant Survey and Interviews | 37 |
| Survey Cover Letter | 38 |
| Rural Cooperative Senior Housing Survey | 39 |
| Key Informant Return Page | 45 |
| Key Informant Questions | 46 |
| Appendix B: Homestead Resident Survey | 47 |
| Survey Cover Letter | 48 |
| Homestead Survey | 49 |

INDEX TO TABLES AND GRAPHS

REPORT ON KEY INFORMANT SURVEY & INFORMANTS

| | | |
|---------|---|----|
| Table 1 | <i>Survey Respondents' Reports on Community Assessment</i> | 13 |
| Table 2 | <i>Survey Responses by Town</i> | 17 |
| Table 3 | <i>Survey Respondents by Town Population</i> | 18 |
| Table 4 | <i>Survey Respondents' Roles in Planning Process or Cooperative</i> | 18 |

REPORT ON HOMESTEAD RESIDENT SURVEY

| | | |
|------------|---|-------|
| Table 4.1 | <i>Descriptive Statistics of Variables</i> | 27-29 |
| Table 4.2 | <i>Descriptive Statistics of Variables on the Effects of Cooperative Housing on Respondents</i> | 30 |
| Figure 3.2 | <i>Gender</i> | 32 |
| Figure 3.3 | <i>Marital Status</i> | 32 |
| Figure 3.4 | <i>Education</i> | 32 |
| Figure 3.5 | <i>Age</i> | 32 |
| Table 4.4 | <i>Descriptive Statistics on Income Level of Older Adults Living in Rural Cooperative Housing</i> | 33 |
| Table 4.5 | <i>Descriptive Statistics of Previous Home Among Older Adults Living in Rural Co-op Housing</i> | 33 |
| Table 4.6 | <i>Descriptive Statistics for the "Quality of Life" and "Cooperative" Dimension</i> | 35 |
| Table 4.7 | <i>Correlation Coefficients for the Variables Cooperative, Life Quality, Location, Years, Gender, Marital Status, Age, Education, Income, & Miles</i> | 35 |
| Figure 4.3 | <i>Quality of Life / Gender Comparison</i> | 35 |
| Figure 4.4 | <i>Cooperative / Gender Comparison</i> | 35 |
| Table 4.8 | <i>Descriptive Statistics of Homestead Living</i> | 36 |

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2000 awarded a grant (USDA-RBS 99-12) to the Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) for a project entitled *Developing and Sustaining Rural Senior Housing Cooperatives*. CDF's history of support for rural senior housing cooperatives made it an ideal headquarter for the project. The study targeted rural communities with sufficient population and services to support senior housing cooperatives and senior with total annual incomes of \$15,000 to \$50,000 (an income group including over 70% of seniors in the US).

Developing and Sustaining Rural Senior Housing Cooperatives

USDA RBS99-12

REPORT ON KEY INFORMANT SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

Dr. Susan Lanspery, Brandeis University

I. Introduction

As part of the Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) goal to explore the benefits of rural senior housing cooperatives for communities and the low- to moderate-income older people living in them, 28 key informants were surveyed through in-depth telephone interviews. Those surveyed include bankers, realtors, community leaders, planning committee members, cooperative management staff, and others. Respondents were associated with efforts that resulted in the construction of co-ops and those that did not.

This report summarizes the findings from the surveys and telephone interviews. It discusses the main themes from both efforts, describes the respondents, and discusses findings related to Homestead Housing Center (HHC).

II. Highlights of Findings

Perhaps the most striking result from both surveys and phone interviews is the respondents' overwhelming enthusiasm for rural senior housing cooperatives, despite dissatisfaction with one or more aspects of the process as they experienced or observed it. With constructive suggestions for improving the process, they believe that if future efforts build on lessons learned in the past, senior housing cooperatives can be viable over the long term and provide an excellent housing option for low- to moderate-income older people in rural communities.

Respondents stressed the following advantages of rural senior cooperative housing:

- Shareholders preserve their hard-earned home equity and continue to experience homeowner tax advantages
- Seniors retain control over their housing and their lives
- Expenses related to maintenance chores are minimized while allowing shareholders to maintain control over them
- The community created is supportive and safe, yet independent and affordable
- Older people remain in their communities, continuing to contribute to the community's social, spiritual, and financial health
- Independence through accessibility and support, and interdependence through community and shared responsibility is promoted.
- Shareholders benefit from economies of scale to save money on and increase flexibility of services such as maintenance, repair, landscaping, housekeeping, transportation, and shopping assistance

Survey respondents ranked several factors influencing the project's success or failure. The following were ranked first or second most important by the indicated percentage of respondents:

- Leadership (28%)
- Community desire to keep seniors in community or attract seniors from nearby communities (26%)
- Support from community leaders (25%)
- Costs of cooperative unit (19%)

Survey and interview respondents focused on the following key themes:

- Financing
- Marketing
- Feasibility assessment
- Sound business practices
- Local involvement
- Support for cooperatives
- Cooperatives as a community resource
- Cooperatives as wonderful places to live

The remainder of this section discusses these key themes. Since the respondents approached the topics constructively, the themes are discussed as “lessons learned.”

Financing

Many respondents would like to see modest public policy incentives for developing cooperatives. Predevelopment grants or loans could make a big difference in the cooperative’s ultimate success, including helping to ensure that communities undertake needed feasibility research and early marketing activities (discussed further below). Several also noted a need to extend existing mechanisms for home purchases to cooperatives — for example, one said, “we need a secondary market for cooperative financing.” Respondents were strongly opposed, however, to “too much” public intervention. In general, they felt that public policies do not stand in the way of cooperative development. They felt strongly that a cooperative should “make sense”: if a community does not want one enough to be willing to invest in it, and if the feasibility research is not compelling, the cooperative should not be built.

Preconstruction sales are generally seen as crucial to success. Many respondents recommended that at least 50% of the units — quite a few recommend 60%, 70%, or even more — should be sold before construction begins, with a significant down payment (generally over \$1000) required as a sign of commitment. The need for good, fair, and minimally risky methods for guaranteeing the costs of unsold units was also frequently mentioned. A number of people suggested that bankers, while generally supportive, might need some education about, for example, financing share loans.

Financing flexibility is important: an approach that works in one community won’t necessarily work in others. Each situation is different, and situations can change rapidly. In some communities, people may prefer to pay more up front, and less in monthly payments; in other communities, the reverse may be true, or a mix may be the best idea.

Many people feel strongly that appreciation should be limited to keep the cooperative affordable.

Marketing

Marketing must be adequately funded, professional, energetic, and personal if the cooperative is to succeed. Many respondents felt that inattention to or insufficient resources devoted

to marketing caused some projects to fail and others to experience slow sales. As many pointed out, “you have to sell a concept, a style of living, not just real estate.”

Even though many potential shareholders, developers, bankers, and realtors are familiar with cooperatives for supplies, food, and electrical power, they are not necessarily familiar or comfortable with the idea of *housing* cooperatives. Many respondents asserted that broad-based informational campaigns would promote community interest and boost sales. Respondents frequently said that *visiting other cooperatives* is one of the best ways to market the cooperative housing concept. As one person said, “People want to see what they’re buying”; another said, “They have a ‘kick the tires’ approach.” Many respondents believe that current owners are the best salespeople. They pointed out that it may take a while for a new cooperative to sell all its units, but once it is up and running, it usually develops a waiting list. The idea is that when people understand the housing cooperative concept — and especially when they see it in action — they are much more likely to buy into it.

Such visits can also be beneficial for community members involved in planning, and may even spark a friendly competition: “if [that community] can do it, so can we.” This and other arguments also support the notion of building new cooperatives that are not too far from existing ones, so that new cooperatives can benefit from people being able to visit and word-of-mouth knowledge about the nearby cooperative.

Marketing materials and efforts should stress the financial and social advantages of cooperative living. “Why pay rent if you can own?” is a good selling point, as is the concept that owners are proud of their property and want to take care of it. Marketing should explain the monthly fees — after moving in, some cooperative owners “say they’ve bought their unit and don’t understand why they still have to pay ‘rent.’” Prospective buyers need to understand how these fees replace (and are often cheaper than) their current home maintenance and utility costs. Single-family homeowners often don’t realize how much they spend on maintenance, repair, and utility costs. People also need to understand in advance that they will get a certificate instead of a deed. Most prospective owners, but especially those who have lived on farms, may benefit from information about how to adjust to closer quarters. Some respondents reported that unprepared farmers who moved into the cooperative felt that “everyone was watching them.”

Marketing should also stress the cooperative’s independent and interdependent atmosphere, offsetting any tendency for the public to view the cooperative as a nursing home. This was an unexpected and challenging perception in some communities. Some respondents said that the best way to approach this is if the first people who move in to the cooperative are relatively young and healthy. They believe well-coordinated marketing strategies can accomplish this. Many respondents noted too that successful strategies will be sensitive to the market’s unique characteristics: rural, older, generally low to moderate income, and often without much knowledge of the option being marketed. The ideal marketer would be a marketing expert familiar with and connected to the local community, knowledgeable about the concerns of rural residents and older people, and well-informed on housing cooperatives. There are many potential selling points for this population, though — for instance, one person said, “Farmers enjoy cooperative ownership because it gives them something to do and keeps their fingers in ‘business.’”

Marketing strategies must also be sensitive to family influences. Respondents cited instances where family members pushed the older person to buy into the cooperative and other instances where family members talked an enthusiastic prospective buyer out of it.

Feasibility Assessment

Communities and developers must pay careful attention to the town's size and characteristics, especially the local economy and the demand for the cooperative. Several respondents felt their project had too many units for the local market. Many cautioned against the "if you build it, they will come" approach, and strongly stated that a cooperative should not be built if the market research isn't compelling. Several noted that the units can't be priced above the median values of the homes owned by the elderly in town. At the same time, more than a few believe that building cooperatives smaller than about twelve units is not wise: smaller cooperatives, they say, drive up per unit costs and fees, and face more challenges in management and marketing. A few think that a cooperative fewer than 25 units may not be feasible, except in extremely favorable situations.

Most recommendations for the minimum town size to ensure a sufficient market for a successful project ranged from 2000 to 5000 people. Smaller or isolated communities may face the added challenge of having to pull contractors and workers from long distances.

Most respondents, however, agreed that a successful project requires a good local economy (including both the town and the surrounding area²), with one or more stable major employers; good public resources such as a public library and a quality school system ("if there's no school, the town dries up"); good health care, with a community hospital or clinic in or near town; good shopping; and other amenities. Such communities usually have sufficient demand for housing so that older people can sell their homes at reasonable prices before moving into the cooperative. They are also desirable communities from the older person's point of view.

Several respondents noted the importance of knowing what other senior housing options exist or are being planned locally. A need for senior housing and a tight housing market can help ensure the cooperative's success. In one town, simultaneous development of the cooperative, a condominium complex, and apartments was detrimental to all three projects.

Other favorable community characteristics noted were the local presence of other cooperative businesses; a "culture of cooperation," of working together; and a generally positive attitude toward older people. A diverse, well-respected community planning board can move the project forward. Respondents recommend that board members represent diverse professions (frequently mentioned were bankers, businesspeople, clergy, and lawyers) and a cross-section of the community (as one person said, "ask for a representative from every church in town so people won't reject the cooperative because their group is not represented"). This type of board helps to ensure needed publicity and support. In addition, many respondents discussed the importance of one or more "sparkplugs" — exceptionally enthusiastic people who believe in the idea and will work to make it happen. Some respondents also suggest recruiting a major sponsor as well as grassroots support. Without a major sponsor, otherwise interested people may stay away from the cooperative because they feel the risks are too high.

Finally, many felt that better advance research would have made the design of their community's cooperative more appealing to the local market and speeded up sales (e.g., a greater proportion of two-bedroom or two-bath units, or an attached garage for each unit).

As Table 1 shows, most survey respondents reported their communities had made at least modest efforts to assess community needs prior to planning the senior cooperative housing project.

TABLE 1

Survey Respondents' Reports on Community Assessment

Before beginning to plan the co-op senior housing project, to what extent...

| | To a great extent | To a fair extent | Somewhat | Not much at all |
|---|-------------------|------------------|----------|-----------------|
| ...Had your community assessed economic, housing, and other needs? | 22% | 43% | 28% | 7% |
| ...Was your community evaluating ways to improve services to seniors? | 16% | 40% | 33% | 12% |
| ...Did your community consider senior housing an important priority? | 25% | 41% | 25% | 9% |
| ...Had your community evaluated housing options for seniors? | 18% | 35% | 32% | 15% |

Sound Business Practices

Respondents' enthusiasm for the rural senior cooperative housing concept is tempered by clear recognition that sound business practices must be followed if these cooperatives are to succeed. For example, attention must be paid to quality control during planning, marketing, construction, and move-in phases. The design should be first-rate, senior-friendly, and attractive. The quality of construction is very important. The cooperative's location should be convenient and appealing to the local market. A cooperative must develop adequate reserves to assure long-term viability and prevent sudden big bills for maintenance and repairs.

Respondents also counseled a balance between "patience" — because, as with many projects, each step takes longer than one expects — and the need to "keep moving — don't let things drag." Letting the process slow down unnecessarily creates problems that are hard to solve.

Once the cooperative is complete, top-notch management is needed for long-term viability — to make the cooperative a good place to live, with a good reputation, so that it enjoys easy resales. Cooperative management is "more than lawn-mowing — its property management and people management." It "needs a 'people person' who can communicate, communicate, communicate." A manager should "create an energetic social atmosphere" — perhaps encourage or facilitate coffee hours and other social activities. Management needs to be

competent but remember that the board is “the boss.” Some people “may feel put-upon with 25 bosses.”

Many said that board training and development are crucial to good management. A number of respondents liked the notion of a lengthy transition from the founding board to the self-governing board. A weak board can be at a manager’s mercy, and a board can be “weak” if too many owners are frail or ill. (This is another area where smaller cooperatives are at a disadvantage, with a smaller population from which to draw board members.) At the same time, even an active board can lack foresight, especially when it comes to keeping monthly fees down. The latter is a problem or potential problem noted by many respondents. One board refused to spend money on a manager’s salary — despite the bylaw’s requirements to do so — and tried to accomplish management tasks with fragmented, part-time, contracted assistance. The same board also deferred needed maintenance to keep monthly fees down.

Respondents described other challenges of cooperative living for management, boards, and community supporters. As one respondent pointed out, “If you want to be uncommitted, renting is wiser. It’s easier to blame something you don’t like on a nameless, faceless management company than on a neighbor.” Another said, “it takes work to get people to pitch in cooperatively” when they’re used to operating on their own; and a third said, “You have to abide by the majority’s wishes even if you don’t like it.” Even a very enthusiastic advocate acknowledged, “It’s inefficient and there’s potential for conflict. Boards can be self-serving or make bad decisions.” Some residents don’t like meetings; some don’t like the constraints of cooperative rules and regulations. Still, as numerous respondents noted, day-to-day disagreements are “par for the course in life” — whether in cooperatives or other settings — and all were essentially optimistic that such problems can be addressed through discussion. Others told stories about cooperative owners who had entered as skeptics, even “curmudgeons,” and had become satisfied residents.

A number of respondents recommended flexibility and advance planning with respect to aging in place. One popular recommendation was that owners be allowed to appoint surrogates to serve for them on the board, or to speak for them at cooperative meetings. Another repeated suggestion was that a limited number (i.e., fewer than 50%) of community members be allowed to serve on the board, to support the owners and connect the cooperative to the community without taking control away from owners. Several people also mentioned the wisdom of thinking ahead to a time when more owners may need services — not with the intention to assume that problems will occur, or to turn the cooperative into assisted living but simply to develop strategies and approaches before a crisis occurs. In reference to this and other issues, one respondent spoke for many when he said, “Cooperatives should not be dogma. Stay true to the spirit and principles but be flexible.”

When survey respondents were asked what services rural senior housing cooperatives do and should provide, the top-ranked services (in order) were property management (maintenance, financial management), transportation, heavy housekeeping, shopping and other errands, and coordinating health and social services.

Reassuringly, only 16% of survey respondents said that residents’ illnesses or disabilities have challenged the quality of life in the cooperative to a great or fair extent. Twenty-five percent said that this had occurred somewhat, and 58% said it had occurred either not much or not at all.

Local Involvement

Respondents recommend maximizing local involvement at all stages and developing strong, community-wide support. From early in the planning process through an operational cooperative, *community leaders* and *local contractors and subcontractors* should be as involved as possible, with guidance from outside as needed. Most respondents considered community leadership as a key to success. Many believe that local contractors and subcontractors would have enhanced communities' ability to control and ensure accountability.

Support for Cooperatives

According to most respondents, communities interested in developing cooperatives need technical assistance. Many believe a centralized source of information, consultation, and hands-on assistance should exist. As one person said, "It's like nothing else you've ever done. Prepare to go to school!" Another said, "Books can help, but you can't develop it just from a book." A third admonished, "remember you're building a community — it's not just housing."

A number of respondents recommended developing mutual associations or federations in which cooperatives bond together for mutual support and economies of scale. For instance, they could collaborate on board training activities; purchase supplies, accounting and payroll services, and insurance at a group discount; and develop common marketing materials.

Cooperatives as a Community Resource

Cooperatives provide lower-maintenance independent living for elders, enabling them and their personal, social, and financial assets to stay in the community. The desire to retain seniors was a key factor in influencing respondents' decisions to participate in planning or developing cooperative housing.

Cooperatives also open up single-family houses for younger families and people moving into town and have a beneficial economic ripple effect. In some rural towns people over 55 own more than half the homes. In a tight housing market, a cooperative can break the housing "logjam." (Another plus is that the housing it frees up is usually older and more affordable.) It creates jobs and positively affects everyone involved with home renovation, repair, and redecoration. One hardware storeowner reported his "best year ever for appliances and paint" when the cooperative opened. In one community, the sale of fifteen or so cooperative units was associated with a turnover of about 50 houses. The cooperative may also be an important part of economic development and a welcome contributor to the town's tax base.

Additionally, cooperatives can share their common space. A cooperative's common area could be used as a community meeting space, a function hall for events such as wedding receptions, or as a congregate meal site for shareholders and other community residents.

Cooperatives as Wonderful Places to Live

Respondents felt extremely positive about the cooperatives' quality of life. Shareholders are very satisfied and active in their communities. They stay independent, healthier, and happier longer: the daughter of one owner said, "If he was still in his house, he'd be dead." Maintaining control, retaining assets, and participating in the daily life of a community all contribute to empowerment and security. Following are just a few of the respondents' numerous positive statements:

“It’s good seeing people socialize. It is great security knowing someone is close by. They are finding it is much cheaper to live here than in their own homes.”

“Everyone who lives there thinks it’s the greatest thing in the world.”

“People who moved in are so happy they didn’t have to leave their communities.”

“People watch out for each other. If someone is missing at morning coffee, someone else checks on them.”

“People like having a say in what happens.”

“Managers talk a lot about how seriously owners take their responsibilities. And this responsibility keeps people involved and gives them a sense of accomplishment, improving their health and mental health.”

Several respondents described an attractive balance in cooperative living. Frequently mentioned were the balance between companionship and privacy and the balance between ‘carefree living’ and a stimulating atmosphere.

Even the few who were somewhat negative about their own experiences were positive about the cooperatives as good places to live. One said, “It was worth any hassle to see how happy the residents are.” Another said, “I would’ve quit if we hadn’t visited and seen all those smiling faces.”

When asked to what extent current residents are satisfied with the cooperative, 73% of survey respondents said a great extent; 24% a fair extent; and 3% “somewhat.”

Telephone interview informants overwhelmingly stated that people were better off financially, socially, and physically in a cooperative than in their former single-family home. Survey respondents identified the following specific benefits of living in a cooperative:

- More social activity (identified by 85%)
- More independence (identified by 69%)
- More physical activity (identified by 55%)
- Improved function (identified by 50%)
- Improved health (identified by 37%)
- Improved financial circumstances (identified by 21%)

III. Who Were the Respondents?

Survey Respondents

The survey respondents were 55% male and 45% female. Twenty-two percent were age 75 or over; 20% were age 65-74; 34% were age 50-64; and 24% were under 50. Virtually all respondents were Caucasian — not surprising given the demographics of the region.

After mailing surveys to 235 people in 22 communities, we received responses from 108 people in 21 communities, for a 46% response rate. Table 2 shows the number of responses from each community. We had a reasonably proportional response from communities with successful and unsuccessful cooperative experiences. In 17 of the communities surveyed, a senior housing cooperative was successfully developed; in five, a cooperative was attempted but not completed. Among all responses, 82% were from communities in which a cooperative had been developed, and 18% from those in which the cooperative was not completed.

TABLE 2
Survey Responses by Town

| TOWN | NUMBER OF SURVEY RESPONSES |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Beloit, KS | 5 |
| Brookfield, MO | 0 |
| Chillicothe, MO | 7 |
| Chisago Lakes, MN | 4 |
| Crosslake, MN | 3 |
| Estherville, IA | 4 |
| Grand Marais, MN | 6 |
| Greenfield, IA | 5 |
| Hartley, IA | 7 |
| Hull, IA | 5 |
| Jackson, MN | 9 |
| Laurens, IA | 6 |
| Maryville, MO | 6 |
| Mt. Horeb, WI | 8 |
| New Hampton, IA | 6 |
| Redwood Falls, MN | 6 |
| Rockford, MN | 3 |
| Roland, IA | 4 |
| Spirit Lake, IA | 5 |
| Springfield, MN | 2 |
| St. James, MN | 2 |
| Worthington, MN | 5 |

Survey respondents ranked several factors that influenced their decision to participate in planning and/or developing senior cooperative housing. The following were ranked as first or second most important by the indicated percentage of respondents:

- Retain seniors in town (55%)
- Economic benefit to community (42%)
- Future or immediate need for housing for self or relative (32%)

Telephone Interview Respondents

Of the 28 people interviewed by phone, eleven were “general” informants who have had experience with multiple rural senior housing cooperatives, often through national or regional organizations. The remaining seventeen represent specific cooperatives in eleven different communities.

Table 3 shows the distribution of survey respondents according to town population.

TABLE 3
Survey Respondents by Town Population

| Town Size | Number/percent of respondents |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Up to 4,999 people | 72 people / 67% of respondents |
| 5,000 to 9,999 | 24 people / 22% of respondents |
| 10,000+ | 11 people / 10% of respondents |

Table 4 shows how the survey respondents described themselves. The total of 117 is greater than the number of surveys received because respondents could describe themselves in more than one way.

TABLE 4
Survey Respondents' Roles in Planning Process or Cooperative

| ROLE | NUMBER IN THIS ROLE |
|--|----------------------------|
| Community member — no specific affiliation | 37 |
| Local business representative | 19 |
| Financial institution representative | 17 |
| Planning/Advisory Board member | 15 |
| Public sector representative | 11 |
| Real estate industry representative | 7 |
| Involved in current cooperative management | 5 |
| Faith-based organization representative | 3 |
| Private consulting firm representative | 3 |

The study team tried to interview five additional people. We could not find current contact information for three of the five; the fourth said he lacked the specific and recent experience

information for three of the five; the fourth said he lacked the specific and recent experience that he believed would be most useful to us; and the fifth said that he was not able to participate because of a hectic travel schedule.

Most of the telephone interviews took an hour or so to complete. Some respondents sent additional materials they thought might be helpful to the study. The interviewers took extensive notes that were later analyzed for pertinent themes.

IV. Homestead Housing Center Findings

The Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) established revolving loan funds for rural senior housing cooperatives with \$750,000 in Retirement Research Foundation grants and \$350,000 from the National Cooperative Bank and its Development Corporation. In addition, Midwestern cooperative organizations provided \$2 million to cover the costs of unsold units and \$500,000 in seed capital to support the 1991 start-up of HHC, a nonprofit organization intended to assist rural communities to develop senior housing cooperatives. Through 1998, when it ceased development operations to concentrate on a workout plan for unsold units, HHC worked in 34 Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin communities and helped build 358 new units in 17 of these communities. HHC provided technical assistance and helped community leaders conduct market research, put together plans and financing, and market the units.

Although this study was not an evaluation of HHC, virtually all respondents had had experiences with HHC in one form or another, and these experiences inevitably dominated their responses. To that end, we are including the following list of the HHC-related issues raised most often in the surveys and telephone interviews:

- Financing, especially with respect to mechanisms used for guaranteeing the costs of unsold units
- Inattention or inadequate resources devoted to marketing
- Expanding too fast in too wide a geographic range
- An insufficiently businesslike approach
- Lack of quality control
- Paying insufficient attention to feasibility research and community members' knowledge about local market characteristics

about rural senior housing cooperatives (at least under "good" circumstances) and felt they'd learned a lot about "how to do it right."

NOTES

¹ Many respondents noted that even shareholders with initial misgivings about privacy or other issues almost always adjusted happily and quickly.

² Survey respondents said that some people from neighboring communities moved to the cooperatives: 33% said this occurred to a fair or great extent; 37% said it occurred "somewhat" and 30% not much or not at all.

Developing and Sustaining Rural Senior Housing Cooperatives

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REPORT ON HOMESTEAD RESIDENT SURVEY

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I. Introduction

Older adults in rural communities want to stay in their home communities where their children were raised, land was tilled, lifetime friends remain, and sense of “home” exists. However, housing in rural America remains a concern. Many older adults express a desire to live in their own homes but services are not always available and many homes are not safe or functional for older adults in aging years. Statistics show that older adults, especially in rural communities, are likely to live in older dwellings that require much maintenance and are not easily adapted to meet the special needs of the aging population. Older rural adults are also more likely to live in poorer housing than their urban counterparts (Bull, 1993). Housing for older adults in rural communities remains a dilemma and influences the quality of life of these older adults. There are several housing alternatives for older adults and one possible option is rural cooperative housing.

The problem of providing viable, functional housing options for older rural adults continues to be an intractable and crucial question which invites much attention and requires serious consideration by the older adults making housing decisions and the communities involved in the planning and policy making. To compound the problem, the older adult population has tripled since 1900 and the most rapid increase is predicted to occur between the years 2010 and 2030 when the “baby boomers” reach 65. The American population is getting older and the number of older adults is increasing at a rapid pace. Therefore, the demand for more and better housing options has surfaced as a major older adult issue. Alarming, there is little evidence that adequate senior housing options have increased appropriately. Several gaps in the knowledge and research of this housing issue remain untouched.

Stevens-Long and Commons (1992) indicated that at the time of the writing of their book, *Adult Life*, no correlational research existed on satisfaction of elderly living in conventional, condominium, cooperative, or mobile housing. Studies of housing projects and developed communities suggest that life satisfaction and social behavior are positively correlated to one’s environment. Satisfaction with home is distinct from, but related to attachment to place - the way in which one lives and environmental features are subjectively intertwined (Stevens-Long and Commons, 1992). Research is beginning to identify the variables that relate to home and quality of life.

II. Purpose and Objectives of this Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the quality of life of older adults living in a housing option referred to as rural cooperative housing. These results can help developers better define the components that are important in determining the most desirable community and individual suited to living in cooperative housing. The following objectives were identified to lend direction and strength to developing and sustaining rural cooperative housing for older adults:

1. Identify the reasons why older adults choose to move to cooperative housing.
2. Describe the effects living in rural cooperative housing have on older adults.
3. Describe the personal characteristics of older adults living in rural cooperative housing.
4. Determine the quality of life of the Homestead residents.

The purpose of this study was to subjectively and objectively describe quality of life factors among older adults living in rural cooperative housing. If older adults, families of older adults, community developers, sociologists, demographers, etc. had a better understanding of the quality of life of older adults in rural cooperative housing, they might be able to better determine the best type of housing to insure a better quality of life among older adults wanting to remain in their rural communities.

Quality of life was operationally defined by nine statements in the 32-item questionnaire. Statements influencing respondents' decision to move to a Homestead Cooperative was operationally defined by 12 statements in the 32-item questionnaire.

III. Significance of this Study

The argument in support of this research - what is the quality of life of older adults living in rural cooperative housing - offers many implications in older adult housing development and older adult research. Identifying the variables that correlate to quality of life helps community developers determine the best suitable housing for older adults in specific communities and helps gerontologists predict the future social and life temperament of the older adult population.

Will cooperative living facilitate satisfying retirement years for older adults? When the rural dimension is introduced, will the issue of where to house rural older adults come into play? These questions will be concerns older adults, gerontologists, community developers, and policy makers will need to explore in integrating rural older adults to local communities, increasing the quality of life, maintaining social structures, encouraging independence, and preserving "rurality".

Many studies show older adults tend to be concentrated in center-city parts of urban areas and in rural areas (Lawton, 1980; Tierney, 1987; Golant, 1992). Glasgow (1988) reported the percentage of elderly in rural areas generally is higher in villages with fewer than 2,500 residents and lowest in large towns and open countryside. One reason for this concentration of older adults in rural villages is from farmers moving into town after they retire, reducing the farm population while increasing village and small town populations with older adults (Glasgow, 1988).

Statistics show a slight tendency for greater proportions of the 85-and-older adults to live in rural areas than urban. It is this age group that statisticians show an increase of 27 times its population since 1900 (AARP and AoA, 1994). If these demographic patterns of distribution continue, the rural picture will show an increased concentration of 85 and older adults (U.S. Senate Special Committee of Aging, 1985).

Research findings to date often find positive correlations between housing for the elderly and general quality-of-life satisfaction, involvement in community and on-site activities, and the quality of socio-behavioral relations (Goudy, 1990; Golant, 1992; Stevens-Long and Commons, 1992; Klein, 1993). These same studies suggest the extent to which older residents feel they can exert some control over their housing environment may also be predictive of their enhanced self-esteem and social involvement.

IV. The Questionnaire

An identical questionnaire was used that was developed by Nolan (1997) to measure the quality of life among older adults in rural cooperative housing.

A group of questions on the instrument addressed the review of literature on the quality of life factors of older adults in rural communities. Additional questions were developed from the review of an instrument administered at Kansas State University (Altus, 1995) measuring older adult perceptions of cooperative housing. Please refer to Appendix B.

V. Mail Survey

A mailed questionnaire (Appendix B) was used to gather the data and was mailed to every current resident (348) at the existing 17 Homesteads in Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin. All individuals living in Homestead cooperative housing were sent a questionnaire with a cover letter explaining the study and request. Two mailing waves were used to insure the highest possible return rate of participant response, 235 responded (68% return). To ensure confidentiality, a code number was assigned to each questionnaire, which corresponded to the number designated to each subject.

VI. Findings

The findings of this study are presented for each research objective identifying the quality of life among older adults living in rural cooperative housing. The subjective and objective research results are merged to represent the true triangulation methodology of the study and to add strength to the credibility of the results. Please refer to pages 32-33 for Tables and Graphs.

Objective 1: *Identify the Reasons Why Older Adults Choose to Move to Cooperative Housing.*

Table 4.1 shows the descriptive statistics in each factor. The responses were categorical, therefore, only frequencies, and percentages were reported.

Seventy-nine percent of the respondents indicated that “wanting a home that they could easily maintain” influenced them to choose cooperative housing. “Staying in the community” was an influencing factor for 66% of the older adults.

Additional factors indicating at least a influencing or somewhat influencing response rate to choosing the cooperative housing option were “help close by” (83%), “better financial investment” (66%), “voice in home operation” (71%) and “handicapped accessible” (85%). Variables showing no influence for the respondents were “difficulty getting around the house” (59%), “feeling isolated at home” (69%), and “wanting to live closer to town” (63%). From the information gleaned from the written comments on the questionnaires, 3 major themes emerged that focused on the cooperative housing concept and the variables that influenced older adults to make the housing decision process:

- Camaraderie of friends
- Ease of maintaining home
- Independent living

“Camaraderie of friends” theme is displayed in statements such as:

“... I love being around people who have the same needs and wants as I do.”

“... I am not alone now, there is always somebody to visit.”

“... After my husband passed away it was a comfort to be living around friends. We have coffee time each morning, Monday through Friday. We all take care of each other.”

“Ease of maintaining home” and “Independent living” was the themes expressed in these shared conversations:

“... It is so nice not worrying about fixing appliances, plumbing, or snow removal. I have the best of two worlds - I own my property but little worry about maintaining it!”

TABLE 4.1-A:

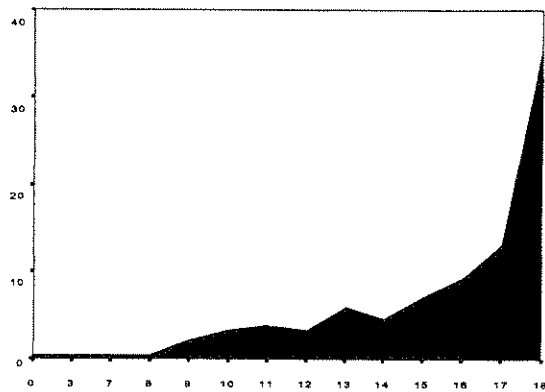
Descriptive Statistics of the Variables Relating to the Decision to Move to Homestead

| <u>Variable</u> | <u>Response</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Personal safety | negative | 7 | 3 % |
| | no effect | 38 | 17 % |
| | positive effect | 184 | 80 % |
| Happiness | negative | 5 | 2 % |
| | no effect | 53 | 23 % |
| | positive effect | 171 | 75 % |
| Life satisfaction | negative | 5 | 2 % |
| | no effect | 50 | 23 % |
| | positive effect | 167 | 75 % |
| Friend contact | negative | 4 | 2% |
| | no effect | 65 | 28 % |
| | positive effect | 159 | 70 % |
| Personal privacy | negative | 6 | 3 % |
| | no effect | 69 | 30 % |
| | positive effect | 152 | 67 % |
| Ease of maintaining home | negative | 3 | 1 % |
| | no effect | 20 | 9 % |
| | positive effect | 204 | 90% |
| Access to leisure activities | negative | 5 | 2 % |
| | no effect | 66 | 29 % |
| | positive effect | 155 | 69 % |
| Live independently | negative | 1 | 0 % |
| | no effect | 51 | 23 % |
| | positive effect | 175 | 77 % |
| Physical health | negative | 3 | 1 % |
| | no effect | 57 | 26 % |
| | positive effect | 163 | 73 % |

TABLE 4.1-B

Descriptive Statistics of the Variables Relating to the Cooperative Values

| <u>Variable</u> | <u>Response</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|---|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Children wanted the move | influenced | 38 | 18% |
| | somewhat influenced | 55 | 25 % |
| | did not influence | 124 | 57 % |
| Difficulty getting around house | influenced | 35 | 17 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 52 | 25 % |
| | did not influence | 124 | 59 % |
| Felt isolated in home | influenced | 29 | 14 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 36 | 17 % |
| | did not influence | 145 | 69 % |
| Difficulty w/ home maintenance | influenced | 88 | 40 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 75 | 34 % |
| | did not influence | 58 | 26 % |
| Wanted help close by | influenced | 100 | 43 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 92 | 40 % |
| | did not influence | 40 | 17 % |
| Wanted to live closer to town | influenced | 45 | 21 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 36 | 16 % |
| | did not influence | 137 | 63 % |
| Better financial investment | influenced | 96 | 44 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 49 | 22 % |
| | did not influence | 76 | 34% |
| Stay in community | influenced | 148 | 66% |
| | somewhat influenced | 28 | 13% |
| | did not influence | 47 | 21 % |
| Wanted voice in operation | influence | 95 | 42 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 67 | 30 % |
| | did not influence | 63 | 28 % |
| Wanted handicap accessible | influenced | 130 | 57 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 64 | 28 % |
| | did not influence | 33 | 15 % |
| Wanted easier maintain home | influenced | 185 | 79 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 37 | 16 % |
| | did not influence | 11 | 5 % |
| Wanted to live closer to friends | influenced | 72 | 32 % |
| | somewhat influenced | 59 | 26 % |
| | did not influence | 95 | 42 % |



Distribution of Quality of Life Values

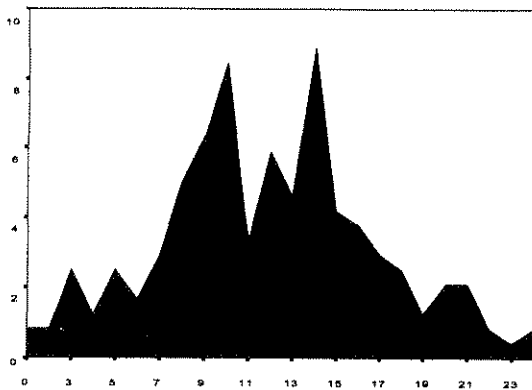
Percent

Mean 15.59
Median 17.00
Mode 18
Std. Dev. 3.05
Range 18

Quality of Life is the Summation of V22 - V 30

Effects HOMESTEAD has on

- V22 - Personal Safety
- V23 - Happiness
- V24 - Life Satisfaction
- V25 - Contact with Friends
- V26 - Privacy
- V27 - Ease of Maintaining Home
- V28 - Access of Activities, Entertainment
- V29 - Independence
- V30 - Physical Health



Distribution of Cooperative Values

Percent

Mean 11.93
Median 12.00
Mode 14
Std. Dev 4.94
Range 24

Cooperative Value is the Summation of V10 - V21

Influences effecting decision to move to HOMESTEAD

- V10 - Children wanted the move
- V11 - Difficulty getting around house
- V12 - Felt isolated
- V13 - Difficulty with home maintenance
- V14 - Help close by
- V15 - Closer to town
- V16 - Better financial investment
- V17 - Stay in community
- V18 - Voice in home operation
- V19 - Handicapped accessible
- V20 - Easier maintained home
- V21 - Closer to friends

“ ... Everything is taken care of. One monthly payment takes care of everything except the telephone. It is even cheaper than my previous home.”

“ ...I have the freedom to leave whenever I want with little worry about the safety of my home. Peace of mind!”

“ ...I feel like I have control of my future. I serve on our cooperative board and it gives me much satisfaction to be a part of the decision-making.”

“ ...Security and ease of living are the two things I appreciate the most. I used to dread the winter months but now I look forward to the season.”

TABLE 4.2

Descriptive Statistics of Variables on the Effects of Cooperative Housing on Respondents

RACE/ETHNIC BACKGROUND

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| African American | 5 | 2 % |
| Caucasian | 207 | 93 % |
| Other | 10 | 5 % |

INCOME LEVEL

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| less than \$9,999 | 5 | 3 % |
| \$10,000-\$19,999 | 59 | 32 % |
| \$20,000-\$29,999 | 55 | 30% |
| \$30,000-\$39,999 | 22 | 12 % |
| \$40,000-\$49,999 | 16 | 9 % |
| \$50,000-\$59,999 | 27 | 14 % |

Objective 2: *Describe the Effects Living in Rural Cooperative Housing Has Had on Older Adults*

The descriptive statistics for these nine items are presented in Table 4.2. Item responses were categorical; therefore, only frequencies and percentage were reported for each item.

“Ease of maintaining home” was the most often reported positive response (90%). Other variables having a positive effect on the quality of life were “independence” (77%), “personal safety” (80%), “life satisfaction” (75%), “happiness” (75%), “amount of contact with friends” (70%) and “physical health” (73%).

When asked, “What do you like the most about Homestead Cooperative?” Similar comments were independence . . . privacy . . . friends . . . safety . . . which were addressed in statements like:

“...I am not alone now.”

“...I can be as social or withdrawn as I feel like on a given day.”

“...I like owning my own home, but the freedom of maintaining my home.”

“...There is such a family atmosphere at Homestead.”

“...I feel like I have control of my future!”

Objective 3: *Describe the Personal Characteristics of Older Adults Living in Rural Cooperative Housing*

These demographic descriptors of the older adults are presented in Figures 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, & 3.5. Seventy percent of older adults were female and (97%) were 65 years of age and older. Forty-two percent of the older adults living in Homestead cooperative housing were married; 53 percent were widowed or divorced; and four percent were divorced or never married. Two percent were African Americans.

Summaries of demographic information for education and income are shared Figure 3.4 and Table 4.4. The education variable and the income variable were calculated as categorical variables. Sixty-two of the respondents (49%) reported post high school, college degree, or beyond a B.S. in the education category. Examination of the income variable found that several respondents chose not to answer this inquiry. From those responding to the income variable, thirty-five percent (35%) reported income of less than \$19,999; forty-two percent (42%) indicated an income between \$20,00 and \$39,999; and twenty-three (23%) showed an income of \$40,000 and higher.

Table 4.5 includes information on the homes previous to the move to Homestead. In the descriptive statistics that shared information about the respondent’s previous residence, 52% indicated having lived in their previous home at least 25 years. Sixty-five percent (65%) within 5 miles of Homestead before moving to the cooperative center. Twenty-five (25%) lived on a farm or in a rural area; 33% lived in a small town with a population under 2,500; 30% lived in a town with population between 2,500 and 9,999; 8% lived in a small city of 10,000 to 49,999 in population; and four percent (4%) of respondents indicated their previous home was in a city with at least a population of 50,000.

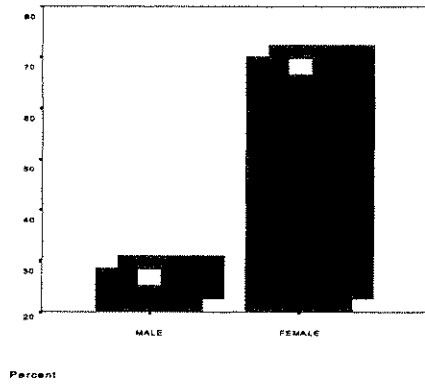


FIGURE 3.2
Gender

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 68 | 29 % |
| Female | 166 | 71 % |

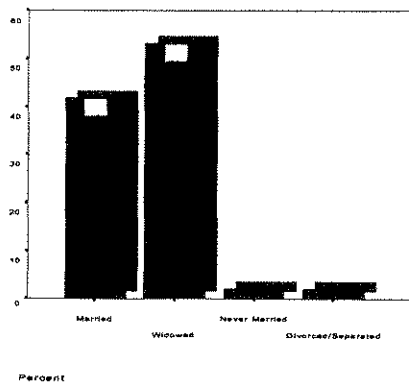


FIGURE 3.3
Marital Status

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Married | 99 | 42 % |
| Widowed | 126 | 54 % |
| Not Married | 10 | 4 % |

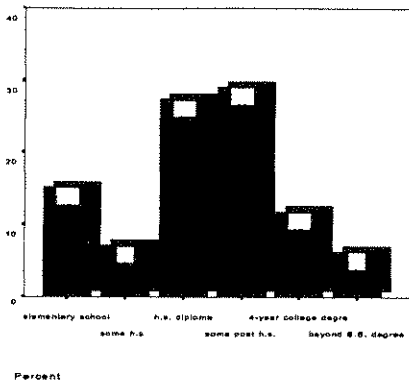


FIGURE 3.4
Education

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Elementary School | 36 | 16 % |
| Some High School | 17 | 7 % |
| High School Diploma | 65 | 28 % |
| Post High School | 69 | 30 % |
| College Degree | 28 | 12 % |
| Beyond B.S. | 15 | 7 % |

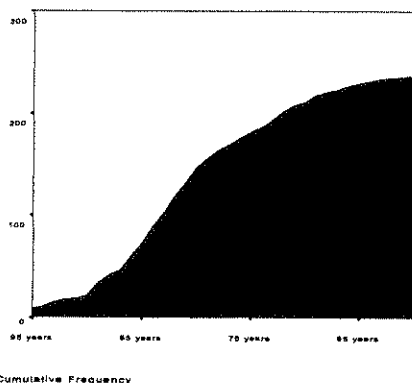


FIGURE 3.5
Age

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------|-----------|------------|
| 85 + | 66 | 29 % |
| 75 - 84 | 108 | 47 % |
| 65 - 74 | 48 | 21 % |
| 55 - 64 | 7 | 3 % |

TABLE 4.4

Descriptive Statistics on Income Level of Older Adult Living in Rural Cooperative Housing

| Highest Level of Education | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Elementary School | 36 | 16 % |
| Some High School | 17 | 7 % |
| High School Diploma | 65 | 28 % |
| Post High School | 69 | 30 % |
| College Degree | 28 | 12 % |
| Beyond B.S. | 15 | 7 % |

TABLE 4.5

Descriptive Statistics of Previous Home Among Older Adults Living in Rural Cooperative Housing

| <u>Variable</u> | <u>Response</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Years lived in previous home | 1 -10 | 44 | 19 % |
| | 11 -25 | 75 | 33 % |
| | 26 - 40 | 62 | 27 % |
| | 41 -50 | 35 | 15 % |
| | 51 and longer | 15 | 6 % |
| Miles away from previous home | Up to 1 mile | 79 | 34 % |
| | 2 -5 miles | 70 | 31 % |
| | 6 - 14 miles | 31 | 14 % |
| | 15 - 40 miles | 30 | 13 % |
| | 45 miles and farther | 19 | 8 % |
| Previous Home Location | Rural Farming | 58 | 25 % |
| | Small Town (2500) | 76 | 33 % |
| | Town (2500-9999) | 69 | 30 % |
| | Sm City (10-49,999) | 17 | 8 % |
| | City (50-100,000) | 3 | 1 % |
| | Large City (>100,000) | 7 | 3 % |
| Lived Before Co-op | Private Home | 206 | 89 % |
| | Child's Home | 1 | 0 % |
| | Apt Complex | 15 | 7 % |
| | Other | 9 | 4 % |

Objective 4: *Determine the Quality of Life of the Homestead Residents*

A “quality of life” variable was defined as the summation of items 22 to 30. These nine items could range from a negative one to positive nine. In the data analysis, this quality of life variable was treated as an interval variable and the range, mean, median, standard deviation and mode calculated. These descriptive statistics are listed in Table 4.6.

A total “cooperative” value was assigned to each respondent by summing the 12 cooperative living variables. In the data analysis the “cooperative” variable was treated as an interval variable and the range, mean, median, mode, and standard deviation were calculated. These descriptive statistics are shared in Table 4.6. The cooperative dimension reported a mean score of 15.59 with a standard deviation of 3.05. The scores ranged from 1 to 18 indicating a median of 17 and a mode of 18.

When asked, “Do you like Homestead housing better than your previous housing”, 58% responded - Yes and 34% indicated Homestead was “about the same”. Two hundred thirty indicated they would recommend Homestead to others and 225 concluded that if they had to make the choice again, yes they would move to Homestead.

Written comments on the questionnaires reflected this same satisfaction as older adults repeatedly shared their satisfaction about their lives and the housing choice they had made during this stage of older years:

“...I have security, managerial support, pleasant surroundings and the companionship of close neighbors.”

“It’s a great concept of living to let someone else worry about shoveling the snow and mowing the grass. It is a relaxing way of life knowing you can shut your door and take off and not worry about vandals.”

“.... There is nothing I don’t like about this Homestead!”

“...Everyone makes you feel important and special - it is like one big happy family.”

“...I have the comfort of being secure and having close friends to be with and help each other.”

“...I love Homestead--it is like living in Heaven. Quiet. Comfortable. Satisfying. That is the way it should be for everyone.”

“...I have a sense of self-worth - I am in control of my future. What a wonderful position to be in your aging years!”

TABLE 4.6

Descriptive Statistics for the "Quality of Life" and "Cooperative" Dimension

| | <u>Range</u> | <u>Mean</u> | <u>Median</u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>Mode</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| Cooperative Dimension | 24 | 11.93 | 12.0 | 4.94 | 14 |
| Quality of Life Dimension | 18 | 15.59 | 17.0 | 3.05 | 18 |

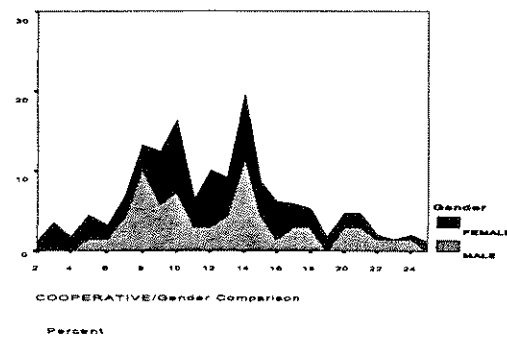
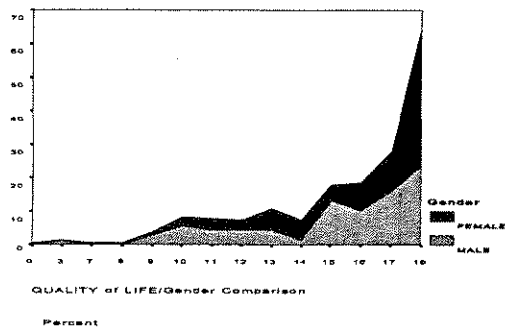


TABLE 4.7

Correlation Coefficients for the Variables Cooperative, Life Quality, Location, Years, Gender, Marital Status, Age, Education, Income, & Miles

Variable Correlations

| | CO-OP | QOFL | PREVIOUS LOCATION | YRS_PREV | GENDER | MARITAL STATUS | YEAR BORN | EDUCATION | INCOME | MI FROM4 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|----------------------|----------|--------|-------------------|--------------|-----------|--------|-------------|
| CO-OP | 1.000 | -.369** | .023 | -.138 | -.111 | -.141 | .093 | .150* | .271** | .091 |
| QOFL | -.369** | 1.000 | -.042 | .046 | .111 | .140* | -.039 | .015 | -.026 | .040 |
| PREVIOUS LOCATION | .023 | -.042 | 1.000 | -.161* | .018 | .155* | .155* | .196** | .096 | .363** |
| YRS_PREV | -.138 | .046 | -.161* | 1.000 | .083 | -.008 | -.199** | -.117 | -.127 | -.095 |
| GENDER | -.111 | .111 | .018 | .083 | 1.000 | .365** | -.009 | .087 | -.039 | -.064 |
| MARITAL STATUS | -.141 | .140* | .155* | -.008 | .365** | 1.000 | .000 | .192** | -.076 | .114 |
| YEAR BORN | .093 | -.039 | .155* | -.199** | -.009 | .000 | 1.000 | .116 | .190* | .039 |
| EDUC. | .150* | .015 | .196** | -.117 | .087 | .192** | .116 | 1.000 | .289** | .112 |
| INCOME LEVEL | .271** | -.026 | .096 | -.127 | -.039 | -.076 | .190* | .289** | 1.000 | .066 |
| MI_FROM4 | .091 | .040 | .363** | -.095 | -.064 | .114 | .039 | .112 | .066 | 1.000 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

VII. A Comparison of Studies on Homestead Living

As mentioned earlier in this report, a similar study was conducted by Nolan (1997) using the same instrument and measuring the same objectives. It is interesting that very little has changed in the results over the 3-year span. The 1997 study utilized data results from 152 participants (possible 163), whereas, the 2000 study population summarized data from 235 (possible 348). More Homesteads have been developed since 1997 resulting in an increased population size in 2000.

Table 4.8

Descriptive Statistics of Homestead Living

| <u>Variable</u> | <u>Category</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Most Lived In Homestead Co-op | 1 - 12 | 64 | 28 % |
| | 13 - 24 | 30 | 13 % |
| | 25 - 40 | 58 | 27 % |
| | 41 - 96 | 73 | 32 % |
| Like Homestead Better | NO | 17 | 8 % |
| | YES | 127 | 58 % |
| | ABOUT SAME | 76 | 34 % |
| Have You Recommended Co-op | NO | 8 | 3 % |
| | YES | 222 | 97 % |
| Need Co-op Option | NO | 3 | 1 % |
| | YES | 224 | 99 % |

VIII. Summary

These concerns and aspirations expressed by older adults who live in rural cooperative housing have been consistent over the past three years. Older adults in rural communities want to stay in their home communities where their children were raised, land was tilled, lifetime friends remain and sense of "home" exists. However, housing in rural America remains a concern. Many older adults express a desire to live in their own homes but services are not always available and many homes are not safe or functional for older adults in aging years. Housing for older adults in rural communities remains a dilemma and influences the quality of life of these older adults. There are several housing alternatives for older adults and one possible option is rural cooperative housing. These two studies provide a foundation and a framework for communities examining rural cooperative housing options for their rural older populations.

APPENDIX A

Key Informant Survey And Interviews

COVER LETTER

February 25, 2000

Dear Colleague,

As our society ages, many communities want to expand housing choices for older people. Cooperative housing shows promise as an option, but information about developing it is limited.

The enclosed survey is part of a Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) study, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The study's goal is to learn more about how to develop and sustain user-owned senior housing cooperatives.

We are sending you this survey because of your experience with planning or developing cooperative rural senior housing. Your answers will help us to articulate the lessons learned from experience, and help others succeed. Your views are important even if the co-op was never built or your participation ended before it was built. We are sending the survey to a range of developers, bankers, legal advisers, community leaders, health and social service professionals, and others involved in planning and/or developing rural cooperative senior housing. (If you moved into the co-op later, please answer primarily from the perspective of your planning experience.)

All information will be kept confidential. No one will be able to identify you or your responses. Individual responses will be combined and reported as percentages.

We would very much appreciate your returning the survey by Friday, March 17, in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

If you have questions about the survey, please call Susan Lanspery at 617-552-4023 (email lanspery@bc.edu). If you have questions about the Cooperative Development Foundation's involvement with the study, please call Gillian Coulter at 202-383-5449.

One final note: we plan to call some of those surveyed to discuss this topic in more depth. If you are interested in talking with us, please return the enclosed name and address page along with your completed survey.

Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Susan Lanspery, Ph.D.
Co-Principal Investigator
Boston College School of Social Work

Judy Ziewacz
Executive Director
Cooperative Development Foundation

RURAL COOPERATIVE SENIOR HOUSING SURVEY

Cooperative Development Foundation, Spring 2000

PLEASE TRY TO ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS. If a question does not apply to you, and no given response fits, please write in NA for "not applicable," DK for "don't know," or a brief explanation.

1. Was the cooperative rural senior housing project with which you were involved completed?
☐ Yes
☐ No
2. Is the project currently operated as a cooperative?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not applicable
3. Is it currently operated as something else (e.g., private apartments, housing co-op for all ages)?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not applicable
4. Please describe the rural cooperative senior housing project and the role(s) you played.
 - a. Number of homes/member shares/units (planned or actual) _____
 - b. Location (planned or actual) — Check all that apply
☐ Residential area
☐ Business district
☐ Center of town
☐ Outskirts of town
 - c. Year construction was completed _____
 - d. Your role(s) and affiliations in the senior housing co-op project — Check all that apply
☐ Dealt with financing issues
☐ Dealt with building issues
☐ Dealt with planning and management issues
☐ Dealt with community issues
☐ Dealt with health and supportive services issues
☐ Represented financial institution (bank, credit union, etc.)
☐ Represented real estate developer
☐ Represented private consulting firm
☐ Represented Cooperative Extension
☐ Represented public sector (local government, county planning, area agency on aging, etc.)
☐ Represented health or social service agency (senior center, hospital, clinic, etc.)
☐ Represented local business
☐ Represented religious organization
☐ Community member (no specific affiliation)
☐ Other — please describe: _____
 - e. Other descriptive information: _____
5. What is your town's total population? _____

6. Please circle the number which best describes recent population trends in your community.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Increasing rapidly Increasing slightly Staying the same Decreasing slightly Decreasing rapidly

7. Before beginning to plan the co-op senior housing project, to what extent had your community assessed its economic, housing, social, health, and other needs? (Please circle the number that shows where your response falls on the scale.)

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

8. Before beginning to plan the co-op, to what extent did your community consider senior housing an important priority?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

9. Before beginning to plan the co-op, to what extent was your community evaluating ways to improve services to seniors?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

10. Before beginning to plan the co-op, to what extent had your community evaluated housing options for seniors?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

11. What other types of housing options for seniors exist in your community? Check all that apply.

☐ Single family housing

☐ Multi-unit rental housing (apartments, duplexes, townhouses, etc.)

☐ Condominiums

☐ Mobile homes

☐ Retirement housing, rest homes, assisted living

☐ Other — please describe: _____

12. To what extent does your community need more housing options for older people?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

13. To what extent does your community have a history of taking risks?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

14. Which of the following factors influenced **your** decision to participate in planning and/or developing cooperative housing? Please rank the factors in order of importance (use "1" for the most important, "2" for the next most, etc.)

- _____ Immediate need for housing for yourself or a relative
- _____ Future need for housing for yourself or a relative
- _____ Economic benefit to the community
- _____ Retain seniors in town
- _____ Personal profit
- _____ Corporate profit
- _____ Other — Please describe: _____
- _____ Other — Please describe: _____

Cooperative endeavors integrate cooperative ownership and governance, social features, and accessibility. Questions 15 - 18 concern this "cooperative concept."

15. Before you got involved with the project, to what extent were **you** familiar with the cooperative concept?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

16. How well known is the cooperative concept **in your community** generally?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Very well known Well known Somewhat known Not well known Not known at all

17. How well known is the cooperative concept **in business** in your community?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Very well known Well known Somewhat known Not well known Not known at all

18. To what extent was the cooperative concept used in **marketing** the senior housing co-op?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

19. In your opinion, which of the following factors most influenced the project's success or failure? Please rank in order of importance (1 being the most important).

- ☐ Cooperative concept
- ☐ Leadership
- ☐ Economic make-up of community
- ☐ Size of community
- ☐ Bias against multi-family housing
- ☐ Costs of other housing options
- ☐ Costs of co-op unit
- ☐ Availability of predevelopment financing
- ☐ Availability of construction financing
- ☐ Support from community leaders
- ☐ Technical support
- ☐ Community desire to keep seniors in community or attract seniors from nearby communities
- ☐ Marketing
- ☐ Availability of other housing options
- ☐ Economic benefit to community (e.g., construction and services jobs)
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____

20. To what extent did the bank(s) in your community actively support the project's development?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

21. How was the co-op financed? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Bank loans
- ☐ Credit union loans
- ☐ Investors
- ☐ Public funds (describe: _____)
- ☐ Other (describe: _____)

22. Which of the following attributes of cooperative housing do potential purchasers view most favorably? Please rank in order of importance (1 being the highest).

- ☐ Tax advantages
- ☐ Owner control
- ☐ Equity preservation
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

23. When you began your involvement, to what extent did you expect the project to succeed (that is, to be built and operated as a viable housing co-op)?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

24. To what extent did the project meet your expectations?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

25. To what extent was the leadership for the co-op project shared among several individuals?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

26. To what extent have residents' illnesses and/or disabilities challenged the co-op's quality of life?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

27. Please check the boxes below to indicate services you think a rural senior housing co-op should provide; what services are provided in the co-op with which you are or were involved; and services that are provided but need improvement. Write "NA" as needed. Feel free to comment below.

| SERVICE | Rural senior housing co-op should provide | Provided in the co-op | Provided, but needs improvement |
|---|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Property management (maintenance, financial management) | | | |
| Light housekeeping (dusting, dishwashing) | | | |
| Heavy housekeeping (vacuuming, window washing) | | | |
| Laundry | | | |
| Shopping and other errands | | | |
| Group meal service or individual meal preparation | | | |
| Transportation | | | |
| Financial management (insurance forms, banking) | | | |
| Personal care (bathing, dressing) | | | |
| Coordinating health and social services | | | |
| Other – Please describe: | | | |

Comments about services:

28. To what extent did you expect people to move to the co-op from neighboring communities?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

29. To what extent did people from neighboring communities move to the co-op?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

30. To what extent are current residents satisfied with the co-op?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5
A great extent A fair extent Somewhat Not much Not at all

31. Which of the following benefits would you attribute to living in a co-op? Check all that apply.

- ☐ No notable benefits
- ☐ Improved health
- ☐ Improved function
- ☐ More independence
- ☐ More physical activity
- ☐ More social activity
- ☐ More discretionary funds
- ☐ Other (please describe) _____
- ☐ Other (please describe) _____

32. If you were to start your involvement with the co-op today, what would you do, or what would you have the planning group do, differently?

33. Of all the lessons you learned, which ones would be most helpful to other communities interesting in developing rural senior housing cooperatives?

34. Would you like to add anything else about your experience with senior housing co-ops?

Please answer the following so that we can profile our informants in the final report.

Gender _____Male _____Female

Date of Birth Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

Racial/ethnic background

White/Caucasian _____ African-American _____ Hispanic-Latino _____ Hispanic-other _____

Asian American _____ Native American _____ Other _____

**YES, I WOULD BE WILLING TO TALK WITH COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION STUDY
INTERVIEWERS ABOUT PLANNING AND DEVELOPING RURAL COOPERATIVE SENIOR HOUSING.**

NAME _____

STREET/P.O. BOX _____

TOWN/STATE/ZIP CODE _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

RBS 99-12

Key Informant Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences with rural cooperative senior housing.
How, when, and why did you become interested in or involved with it? With what different models of senior housing co-ops are you familiar?
2. (a) What characteristics predispose a community to welcome senior co-op housing? What characteristics predispose a community to reject such housing?
(b) What barriers exist to developing senior co-op housing?
(c) What key lessons have you learned about financing senior co-op housing?
What, if any, particular financial strategy best meets the needs of senior housing co-op residents? Are senior housing co-ops economically viable over the long term?
3. What governance mechanisms work best in co-op senior housing? What are the critical management issues in rural senior co-op housing?
4. (a) How, if at all, does living in a co-op affect residents financially?
(b) How, if at all, does it affect residents in terms of health, activities, friendships, independence, feelings of security, personal safety, and life satisfaction?
(c) What do residents like best about life in rural senior housing co-ops? What do they like least?
5. How does a rural senior housing co-op affect the community in which it is located?
6. Have your ideas and feelings about rural co-op senior housing changed over the years? If so, how?
7. What advice would you give someone interested in developing co-op senior housing?
8. What recommendations would you make to policymakers concerning promoting or limiting the development of rural senior housing co-ops?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

APPENDIX B

Homestead Resident Survey

February 21, 2000

Dear Homestead Resident:

Traditional housing may no longer be addressing the quality-of-life and life satisfaction issues unique to our rural older adults. Rural towns cannot afford to lose their seniors to larger communities providing more attractive housing alternatives and services.

Rural communities must consider the life satisfaction issues that accompany housing options. A new concept to many rural communities is the cooperative housing concept. On the enclosed questionnaire, please share the issues that led you to choose the Homestead option and the degree of satisfaction you exhibit since you have become a Homestead homeowner.

Funded by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), this Cooperative Development Foundation study explores the quality-of-life and life satisfaction qualities of older adults who have chosen the cooperative housing alternative. Your Homestead manager has agreed to assist us in requesting your valuable input for this project.

Your contribution to this study is important. Your answers will help the Cooperative Development Foundation determine the need for senior rural cooperative housing. Please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return in the stamped, pre-addressed envelope by **March 10**. All information will be kept confidential. Questionnaires have been sent to residents of all Homestead Housing Centers.

Thank you for your help. This study will be shared with rural communities who are exploring senior housing cooperatives.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Jill Eversole Nolan, Ph.D.
Ohio State University Extension

Judy Ziewacz
Cooperative Development
Foundation

Cooperative Housing for Older Adults



Homestead Housing Questionnaire

“Developing and Sustaining Rural Senior Housing Cooperatives” Study

- USDA, United States Department of Agriculture
- Cooperative Development Foundation
- Rural Business- Cooperative Service

March, 2000

Homestead Housing Questionnaire

The following questions apply to cooperative living at the Homestead Center. Your opinions about cooperative housing issues are important and will help others understand the concept. Thank you for your participation!

INSTRUCTIONS: (CHECK THE APPROPRIATE ANSWER/S.)

1. How long have you lived at Homestead Cooperative? (Fill in the blank.)

___ YEARS

___ MONTHS

2. Where did you live before you moved to Homestead Cooperative? (Check one.)

___ PRIVATE HOME

___ RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

___ CHILD'S HOME

___ APARTMENT COMPLEX

___ OTHER (please specify): _____

3. Where was your previous home located? (Check one.)

___ RURAL, FARMING AREA

___ SMALL TOWN (POPULATION UNDER 2,500)

___ TOWN (POPULATION BETWEEN 2,500 - 9,999)

___ SMALL CITY (POPULATION BETWEEN 10,000 - 49,999)

___ CITY (POPULATION BETWEEN 50,000 - 100,000)

___ LARGE CITY (POPULATION OVER 100,000)

4. About how many miles was your previous home from Homestead Cooperative?
(Fill in the blank.)

___ MILES

5. How many years did you live in your previous home? (Fill in the blank.)

___ YEARS

6. Do you like Homestead Cooperative better than your previous housing?

(Check one.)

_____ NO, WORSE _____ YES, BETTER _____ ABOUT SAME

7. Have you recommended Homestead Cooperative to others? (Check one.)

_____ NO _____ YES

8. Would you move to Homestead Cooperative again if you had to do it over? (Check one.)

_____ NO _____ YES

9. Do you believe older adults need the cooperative living option in their community?
(Check one.)

_____ NO _____ YES

Please rate how much the following items influenced your decision to move to Homestead Cooperative: (Check one for each.)

10. My children wanted me to move. (Check one.)

_____ Influenced me _____ Somewhat influenced me _____ Did not influence me

11. I had difficulty getting around my house.

_____ Influenced me _____ Somewhat influenced me _____ Did not influence me

12. I felt isolated in my home.

_____ Influenced me _____ Somewhat influenced me _____ Did not influence me

13. I had difficulty with the maintenance/upkeep of my home.

_____ Influenced me _____ Somewhat influenced me _____ Did not influence me

Please turn page 51

14. I wanted to have assistance close in case I needed it.

☐ Influenced me ☐ Somewhat influenced me ☐ Did not influence me

15. I wanted to live closer to town.

☐ Influenced me ☐ Somewhat influenced me ☐ Did not influence me

16. Homestead Cooperative was a better financial investment when compared with other retirement housing options.

☐ Influenced me ☐ Somewhat influenced me ☐ Did not influence me

17. I wanted to stay in my home community.

☐ Influenced me ☐ Somewhat influenced me ☐ Did not influence me

18. I wanted a home where I had a voice in its operation.

☐ Influenced me ☐ Somewhat influenced me ☐ Did not influence me

19. I wanted a home handicapped-accessible.

☐ Influenced me ☐ Somewhat influenced me ☐ Did not influence me

20. I wanted a home that I could easily maintain.

☐ Influenced me ☐ Somewhat influenced me ☐ Did not influence me

21. I wanted to live closer to my friends.

☐ Influenced me ☐ Somewhat influenced me ☐ Did not influence me

What effect has living in Homestead Cooperative had on your ...

(Check one for each.)

22. ... personal safety

☐ negative ☐ no effect ☐ positive effect

23. ... happiness

☐ negative ☐ no effect ☐ positive effect

24. . . . life satisfaction

_____ negative

_____ no effect

_____ positive effect

25. . . . amount of contact with friends

_____ negative

_____ no effect

_____ positive effect

26. . . . personal privacy

_____ negative

_____ no effect

_____ positive effect

27. . . . ease of maintaining your home

_____ negative

_____ no effect

_____ positive effect

28. . . . access to leisure activities, entertainment

_____ negative

_____ no effect

_____ positive effect

29. . . . ability to live independently

_____ negative

_____ no effect

_____ positive effect

30. . . . physical health

_____ negative

_____ no effect

_____ positive effect

31. What do you like the most about Homestead Cooperative? (Fill in the blank.)

32. What do you dislike the most about Homestead Cooperative? (Fill in the blank.)

Please turn page 5

Page 5

Please tell us about yourself:

33. What is your gender? (Check one.)

☐ MALE ☐ FEMALE

34. What is your marital status? (Check one.)

☐ MARRIED ☐ WIDOWED
☐ NEVER MARRIED ☐ DIVORCED/SEPARATED

35. In what year were you born? (Fill in the blank.)

YEAR OF BIRTH

36. What is your highest level of education? (Check one.)

☐ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
☐ SOME HIGH SCHOOL
☐ HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR EQUIVALENT
☐ SOME POST HIGH SCHOOL
☐ 4-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE (B.S.)
☐ BEYOND B.S. DEGREE

37. Are you retired? (Check one.)

☐ NO ☐ YES

37a. If you are not retired, what is your employment status? (Check one.)

☐ SELF-EMPLOYED ☐ UNEMPLOYED
☐ SALARIED ☐ HOURLY WAGE WORKER

37b. If you are retired, what was your employment status? (Check one.)

☐ SELF-EMPLOYED ☐ UNEMPLOYED
☐ SALARIED ☐ HOURLY WAGE WORKER

38. How many persons live in your household, including yourself? (Fill in the blank.)
_____ PERSON(S)

39. With whom do you live? (Check all that apply.)
_____ SPOUSE _____ LIVE ALONE
_____ OTHER, (please specify):

40. What is your race/ethnic background? (Check one.)
_____ AFRICAN AMERICAN
_____ HISPANIC
_____ CAUCASIAN
_____ OTHER (please specify):

41. What is your total gross income (before taxes)? (Check one.)

ALL INFORMATION FROM THIS QUESTIONNAIRE WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| _____ LESS THAN \$9,999 | _____ \$10,000 - \$19,999 |
| _____ \$20,000 - \$29,999 | _____ \$30,000 - \$39,999 |
| _____ \$40,000 - \$49,999 | _____ \$50,000 - \$59,999 |

42. Do you live at Homestead year round? (Check one.)
_____ NO _____ YES

43. If no, and live out-of-state for a period of time, please indicate which state and for which months. (Fill in the blank.)

_____ STATE _____ MONTH(S)

44. Please feel free to share additional comments that influenced your Homestead living choice.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

Life consists not simply in what heredity and environment do to us but in what we make out of what they do to us.

- H. E. Fosdick

No. _____

*Return to: Jill Eversole Nolan, Ph.D.
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Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center
1680 Madison Avenue
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
☎ 330-263-3831*
