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FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTES.

(Established in conjunction with the Women's Branch Board  
of Agriculture and Fisheries),  
Food Production Department,  
72, Victoria St., London, S.W. 1.

REFERENCE  
ONLY

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES:

THEIR PART IN THE RECONSTRUCTION  
OF RURAL LIFE.

It has long been felt by those who have given most thought to the problems of the rural revival in this country, and who recognise that the maintenance and development of the Agricultural Industry depend upon improved social and economic conditions, that fuller co-operation of women is necessary for the complete success of such revival. The truth of this was recognised some years ago in Canada where the lonely and onerous lives led by many of the women on the farms threatened to result in an exodus from the country districts to the towns. A movement was, therefore, set on foot to form unions of rural women known as "Women's Institutes." These Institutes, which were in the first place social organizations, quickly developed an important educational side, and by encouraging women to take a larger share and interest in the life and work of the community have had a direct influence on the development of agriculture. Meetings organised by the Institutes brought about an interchange of ideas and a desire for greater educational facilities. These in their turn, while encouraging a better standard of home life, developed the business abilities of the members for the management of those subsidiary branches of Agriculture which are so successfully and profitably carried on by Canadian women. There is now a central organisation of rural Women's Institutes in almost every Province in Canada supported by the Departments of Agriculture, and, in the case of two Provinces, by the Provincial Universities. The movement has also been copied in Belgium, the United States and other countries. It has been the means of arousing latent energy and initiative, and has tended towards consolidation of effort and effective co-operation.

Comparison with Village Guilds.

Although conditions of life in the country districts of England are not altogether comparable to those of Canada, there are many points in common, and the need for the

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greater development of the agricultural industry is on every side apparent. The Agricultural Organization Society in the Summer of 1915 therefore decided to make the experiment of forming similar institutes in England and Wales, and their action has since been confirmed by the Agricultural Education Conference, which in their Report, issued shortly afterwards, recommended "the encouragement of the creation of Women's Institutes, with a view to stimulating a desire for rural education." In October, 1917, the Board of Agriculture decided to place the further promotion of Women's Institutes in the hands of the Women's Branch of the Board. The existing institutes, one hundred and forty in number, formed themselves into the Federation of Women's Institutes which is now the central organization of the movement. It is interesting to note that Women's Institutes correspond very closely to the Village Guilds which existed in England up to the latter part of the fifteenth century, and which exercised so great an influence on the social life of our agricultural districts. The guilds, which included amongst their specific activities the development of agriculture, were "primarily fellowship associations combining in their objects the material and moral welfare of their members. . . . The spirit of all village associations, which were not confined to any class by nature or rule, found its expression in these early Guilds. The results were that mutual insurance and protection were provided for members, communal action was instituted when it was more economical or more conducive to social welfare than individual effort, and, more important than all, the villagers voluntarily joined their personalities in a corporate personality,"\* which personality found expression in various activities that had for their object the social and economic well-being of the community.

### Organization.

The organization of an Institute is exceedingly simple and the rules are elastic in character so as to meet the requirements of any district and to give the utmost scope for individual development. Each Institute has its own committee and officers who are responsible for drawing up the programmes of the members' meetings, which take place once a month, and for otherwise carrying out the business of the Institute. A small membership fee is contributed by each member, and this covers the cost of postage and other incidental expenses. Membership is not limited to the married women, but should include the growing-up girls, for whom it is even more important to provide healthy

\* "Village Clubs and Associations." By Arthur W. Ashby, Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, vol. 75, 1914.

amusement and interest in their daily lives. The meetings, which take place at fixed intervals, are partly educational and partly social gatherings, as will be seen by the specimen programme given at the end of this leaflet.

### Relationship with Other Bodies.

Women's Institutes do not in any way overlap with the work of existing organizations, and indeed should be the means of strengthening them. Thus members of such organizations as the Mothers' Union, Workers' Educational Association, or the Girls' Friendly Society, also belong to a Women's Institute, and those who are engaged in any local work, whether war or otherwise, should be able to interest fellow members of an Institute and obtain their help in promoting such work. The great importance of Institutes lies in their educational value. They are not themselves, of course, teaching bodies, but by organizing in each village classes which can be attended with the minimum of trouble, fuller and better use may be made of existing opportunities such as those offered by the County Council and other bodies, at present but too little known and appreciated.

### Membership.

The success of an Institute must depend on the inclusion of women of all ranks within its scope. Their aim of mutual help and combined effort can only be achieved by a better understanding of each others' needs and interests and of the points of view from which these are regarded. Upon the more leisured members will fall the task of suggesting successful programmes for meetings, and the subjects chosen for the educational part of these should be such as will be of general interest. Every member of an Institute should be encouraged and expected to contribute her share to the success of its undertakings, whether as a speaker or a listener, as a practical worker on the land or in her own home, or as a contributor to the social side of an afternoon's meeting.

### Central Organization.

Each Institute is affiliated to the Federation of Women's Institutes. The value of this is obvious, as the existence of a common centre can keep all Institutes in touch with each other. It will be possible also by this means to arrange conferences where subjects of importance to the whole movement may be discussed, and unity of purpose be encouraged.

### Co-operation.

The teaching of co-operative methods for the more profitable carrying on of the various subsidiary branches of Agriculture is a special feature of the Women's Institutes' work, and the Agricultural Organization Society will arrange for its expert organizers to address meetings on these and kindred subjects.

### The Institutes' Part in the Present Emergency.

Institutes are now in existence in several counties in England and Wales, and in every case the members are turning their attention to the national needs of the moment, particularly to the question of increased food production; in this way they are stimulating the work suggested as the object of the Village War Food Societies. The formation of further Institutes in this country at the present time will meet the need for an organization in each district that shall assist and follow up the work of the Women's War Agricultural Committees in their endeavour to enlist the help of women in farm work. It is obvious that a movement of such wide scope and importance as this land campaign will need to be kept alive and fostered in every way possible, for its value depends upon sustained and continuous effort. To secure this the interest must not only be kept alive but must be constantly re-inforced, and the Institutes by their constitution would seem specially suited to carry this out. An attractive programme for an afternoon's meeting ensures the attendance of all the members, who by thus coming into touch with each other will be encouraged to give all the help that each can offer, whether in work on the farms, or by the increased production of their own gardens, or in the less direct but equally important work of caring for the children and looking after the homes of those who can themselves volunteer to serve in the new Land Army.

The value of Women's Institutes in connection with the Land Campaign has been well expressed by a correspondent, who has recently helped to form an Institute in the North of England. She writes:—"The Women's Institute organization seems to be a power that can knit village communities together as nothing has hitherto done. As I am also working for the Women on the Land Movement I see more and more that something more permanent and substantial is needed than a register of workers and a certain number of interested ladies. Everyone's ardour is bound to cool very quickly without definite work to accomplish directly. In the North the supply of workers seems greater than the demand. Through the Women's Institutes this enthusiasm could still be directed towards a greater production of food and to an interest in many things appertaining to agriculture."

### THEIR WORK AFTER THE WAR.

The results of the present campaign for placing women on the land, if carefully directed, may be the means of arousing interest in all forms of agricultural work as a means of livelihood, particularly in those forms which are most suitable for women, such as poultry rearing, bee-keeping, gardening, fruit growing and dairy work. The opportunity will, however, be lost unless organized and united effort is made. The Women's Branch of the Board of Agriculture will gladly send down a speaker to any part of the country where it is desired to form an Institute, to explain the necessary procedure for setting up a committee and to give such other help as may be necessary.

The Women's Institutes movement is not a war emergency measure but will be of permanent value in the work of rural regeneration.

The following Programme, which has been drawn up by the Committee of one of the Women's Institutes in England, is given as an instance of the varied range of subjects which are under discussion by Institutes generally. Many of the addresses and demonstrations in the Programme are given by members, and one or more members in turn are responsible for the tea with which each meeting terminates.\*

3rd MAY, 1916.

"Every woman who helps in Agriculture during the War is as truly serving as the man who is fighting in the trenches or on the sea."

*Lord Selborne.*

Address ... "Gardening as an occupation for Women."  
Discussion led by a member.  
Demonstration ... Use of the Hay-Box Cooker.  
Talk ... "Women on the Land."  
Reading ... "How to get rid of Flies."  
Exhibit ... "Red Cross Supplies."  
Kindly lent from a neighbouring Workroom.  
Tea and Entertainment.

7th JUNE.

"If I should die, think only this of me.  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England."

Address ... "What can we do for those who are fighting  
for us?"  
Discussion led by a member.  
Talk and Demonstration ... "Bottling Fruit."  
A.O.S. Expert.  
Exhibit of Bottled Fruit.

\* The programme is that of the Hurst Women's Institute and is included by the courtesy of Mrs. Philip Martineau, the President.

Paper on	...	...	...	"Goats as a source of Milk."
Competition	...	...	...	Vase of Wild Flowers.
Suggestion Box	...	...	...	The President.

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5th JULY.

"Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,  
Makes that and the action fine."

Hay-Making Party at the President's House. Chorus Singing.

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2nd AUGUST. Open Meeting.

"A little house well filled,  
A little field well tilled,  
A little wife well willed,  
Are great riches."

Address	...	...	...	"Co-operative Marketing of Produce." A.O.S. Expert.
Demonstration	...	...	...	Making of Soups.
Paper	...	...	...	"Utility Rabbit Breeding."
Vegetable and Fruit Show and Exhibition of Women's Work	Gramophone.			

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6th SEPTEMBER.

"In order to manage children well, we must  
borrow their eyes and hearts, see and feel as  
they do, and judge them from their own point  
of view."

Address	...	...	...	"Toy-making as a Village Industry."
Paper on	"Food Value of Acorns and Horse Chestnuts on the Farm."			
Talk	...	...	...	"Diet for School Children." Display of Children's Work. Entertainment by School Children.

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4th OCTOBER.

"A garden is a beautiful book, writ by the finger of God, every flower  
and every leaf is a word."

Roll Call.				
Address	...	...	...	"Autumn Gardening," County Council Instructor.
Demonstration	...	Labour Saving Devices, including Bread Mixer.		
Paper	...	...	...	"Women as Empire Builders."
Talk	...	...	...	"Current Events" } The President.
Suggestion Box	...	...	...	} The President.
Exhibition:	Potatoes grown with and without artificial manure and comparison of value.			

GOD SAVE THE KING.