



Linoleum, Better Babies & the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930

Marilyn Irvin Holt

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The Progressive Era promoted a vision of America united by an emphasis on science and progressive reform. During the years under this study, every facet of American life came under scrutiny for the possibility of reform. Both experts and laymen believed better management would benefit everyone. Women, as well as men, could be managers. For women in agriculture, reform messages, experts, and science came together to preach a new form of education in domestic economy.

In *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930*, Holt argues that women in agriculture were not passive receptors of this advice. Reformers generally agreed that farm women were the glue that held the rural world together, and farm women saw their place in agriculture as multifaceted and important, so they eagerly accepted improved education. At the same time, they rejected suggestions that conflicted with their own views of the rewards and values of farm life.

Holt also offers a better understanding of the role of women in agriculture from the period where farm women were seen as beasts of burden until they developed their own view of themselves as equal contributors to the success of the farm. She writes with wit and clarity about an important time in the lives of women farmers, "Lines of labor blurred, with couples 'working in harness'--side by side, heading for the same goal--just as plow horses worked together to get the job done."

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