Hopkins Announces Results of Rural Relief Survey.

Rural families going on relief early in the depression were more vulnerable to economic disaster than their non-relief neighbors, principally because they were larger families with less employment and smaller incomes, according to the figures of a survey of rural relief released today by Works Progress Administrator Harry L. Hopkins.

The survey, a "Comparative Study of Rural Relief and Non-Relief Households," which was designed to analyze social and economic differences between relief and non-relief families in the same rural areas in October, 1933, showed relief families to be at a disadvantage in practically every respect, as compared with those not on relief. Relief households averaged one more person than non-relief households, had more children under 15, and fewer persons of the most productive ages, 25 to 45. Heads of relief families were more likely to be under 45 years old than those of non-relief families. Both family heads and children in the relief groups had had less education than those not on relief.

The study was prepared under the direction of Corrington Gill, assistant WPA Administrator in charge of finance, research, and statistics.

The heads of relief families, the study points out, came from poorly paid occupations such as farm laboring, sharecropping, and unskilled industrial work, to a greater degree than did the heads of non-relief families. The family heads in the relief group had less steady employment in the period before going on relief.
than those who continued to maintain themselves. Relief families contained fewer workers or potential workers. For each worker in the relief group there were three dependents. For each worker in the non-relief group there were only two dependents.

Those of the relief family heads who were farmers had smaller farms and owned less livestock than did their non-relief neighbors. Fewer of those on relief owned their farms, as compared to those not on relief.

Greater mobility of relief families was one finding. The survey states:

"The greater frequency with which relief households with male heads had changed residence across county or state lines in the 10 years prior to the survey indicates that they were somewhat less stable than their non-relief neighbors."

Three out of five of the families surveyed lived in the open country; the remaining two lived in villages. More than half of the total number of families studied had usually been employed in agriculture. The others had previously worked in non-farm industries.

Survey figures of average earnings at non-farm jobs indicate that for the 10 years previous to their going on relief in 1933 the relief families were at a lower economic level than those staying off relief in 1933. In October, 1923, the average earning for a relief family head was $80, while non-relief heads averaged $111. In October, 1928, relief heads averaged $73 while their neighbors averaged $104. And in October, 1933, the heads of relief families earned $26 as against the $82 of non-relief heads. The aid of other members of the household boosted the income of relief families for that month from $26 to $31 and income of non-relief families from $82 to $94.

Among Mexican, Negro, and foreign-born white families on the relief rolls women family heads were numerous. The farms of Negroes on relief in the Old South cotton and tobacco areas were little more than half the size of farms operated by
whites on relief in those areas. The non-farm earnings of Negro heads of relief families averaged about one dollar less monthly than the earnings of heads of white families on relief.

Differences between the relief and non-relief group, shown through the use of averages, were not clear-cut in all areas or occupational groups the report says, pointing out that:

"In the case of every trait measured there was considerable overlapping so that no sharp line could be drawn between the two groups. A considerable number of households in the non-relief group were so near the position of the relief group that it is not surprising that many who were not on relief in October, 1933, have been obliged to go on relief since that time."

The survey conducted by the Division of Social Research of the WPA in the winter of 1933-1934, required visits by field investigators to 5,600 relief families and 11,000 families not on relief. These families were scattered through 47 rural counties, representing 13 principal commercial farming areas in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin.