This next week is pretty special to people like me. For you that don’t know there are a several of things that are happening. First we “Spring Ahead” with our clocks in observance of Daylight Savings Time. That always has an effect on me. It seems it takes this old body and brain a while to adjust to that. You might also notice the new life emerging; baby calves, grass greening up and even some early flowers blooming. I also want to point out to you another thing that occurs which is the 43rd anniversary of National Ag Day. Oh and by the way, it is the precursor to the first day of Spring!

The theme this year is “Agriculture: Stewards of a Healthy Planet.” The goal is simple: to establish, or enhance the understanding of how food, fiber and renewable resource products are made, and through that understanding, build a growing appreciation for the contributions of agriculture as a: source for safe, abundant and affordable products; a positive force in the local, national and global economy; and avital part of meeting the growing global challenge of hunger. We must remember that the farmer and rancher are the original caretakers or “stewards” of our animals and our earth!

I think it’s important - particularly on a day like today - to show our gratitude to the many men and women who make agriculture possible. We know that food and fiber doesn’t just arrive at the grocery or clothing store or magically appear on our dinner table or in our closet. There’s an entire industry dedicated to providing plentiful and safe food for consumption as well as a wide range of comfortable, fashionable clothing choices. We rely on agriculture for the very necessities of life. From beef and pork to cotton and corn, agriculture is working harder than ever to meet the needs of Americans and others around the world. And it’s important to remember that American agriculture is not just doing it, but doing it better and more effectively! They are doing more with less and what is even more amazing is the fact is that each American farmer feeds and clothes about 144 people. Plus new technology means farmers are more environmentally friendly than ever before. That’s really what this day is all about, recognizing the role of agriculture and celebrating the role they have on our planet.

I have always been a proponent of agricultural literacy and in fact have made a career of it. I have had the opportunity of the last couple of weeks to talk towards “Protecting Nebraska Agriculture” with the basis of my talk about how and why we are facing the issues we are and what we as producers can do about it. I firmly believe that one of our largest enemies is illiteracy in agriculture, and I think we can use this week to expound on that a bit more. I firmly believe this could be a very good reason for the question: Why Celebrate Ag Day? I see the key reasons to recognize and celebrate Ag Day each year as the opportunity for increased knowledge of agriculture and nutrition allows individuals to make informed personal choices about diet and health. That leads to this year’s theme of a healthy planet. We also need informed citizens who will be able to participate in establishing the policies that will support a competitive agricultural industry in this country and abroad and not be sucked into the sewer of misinformation and myths when it comes to production agriculture.

Beginning in kindergarten and continuing through 12th grade, all students should receive some systematic instruction about agriculture. Agriculture is too important a topic to be taught only to the small percentage of students considering careers in agriculture and pursuing agricultural studies. Agricultural literacy includes an understanding of agriculture’s history and current economic, social and environmental significance to all Americans. This understanding includes some knowledge of food and fiber production, processing and domestic and international marketing. To me it has always been for youth and potential careers. Careers in agriculture are widely varied. Beyond the traditional view of agriculture as strictly crop or livestock farming, opportunities exist in finance, communications, law, government, sales, technology, and more. A knowledge of modern agriculture can translate into almost any career discipline. Simply put I believe that all Americans need to understand the value of agriculture in their daily lives. We need to understand what it takes to be the actual stewards of a healthier planet! We need the tools of technology along with hard work to produce for an ever increasing populace.

Agriculture is one of the fastest-changing industries today, embracing cutting-edge technologies in the pursuit of sustainable food, fiber, and fuel production. High school students today will very likely be employed in careers after college that don’t even exist at the present time! One of my favorite quotations reads: “Once in your life, you will need a doctor, a lawyer, a policeman, and a preacher. But every day, three times, a day, you need a farmer.” I would add that you also need all of the people who support the farmers in myriad ways. Agriculture is vitally important to each and every one of us, and for a young person looking for a stable, interesting, and fulfilling career, choosing agriculture is the way to go!

As we celebrate this week the bounty of the land and our livestock, I encourage you to take a moment and connect with a local farmer or rancher if you are a consumer, and if you are a farmer or rancher – connect and talk with a consumer. Share your story and answer their questions. Farmers and ranchers continue to feed and fuel our lives and consumers are a vital partner. We hear a lot about being advocates for agriculture. I firmly believe we must be but we have to be much more than “AgVocates”, we should be celebrating the strengths of our industry as well as listening, learning, and responding to the concerns of the public. We need to be forward thinking, willing to adapt and change with the concerns and demands of the public without sacrificing best practices based on science. Above all be proud of being a farmer or rancher! You deserve it!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer, which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email: dliemann2@unl.edu or on the web at: http://extension.unl.edu/statewide/webster