



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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This next week has a lot of potential. My reasoning is that you have to think green! I don't necessarily mean the "green" we usually associate with the effort to go to solar/wind energy or extreme environmentalism. I am thinking of the green associated with St. Patrick's Day which I believe falls on March 17-- and then we can stay green in honor of National Ag Day which is the very next day. It is placed in the middle of National Agriculture Week (March 15-21), which I think is very appropriate as "Spring" officially arrives the same week. That is when we in agriculture become excited about the greening up and new life! The theme for National Ag Day is "Agriculture: Sustaining Future Generations." I think we will dedicate this week's edition to the importance of agriculture and why we should celebrate it.

National Ag Day is designed to encourage every American to: 1) Understand how food and fiber products are produced. 2) Appreciate the role agriculture plays in providing safe, abundant and affordable products. 3) Value the essential role of agriculture in maintaining a strong economy. 4) Acknowledge and consider career opportunities in the agriculture, food and fiber industry. What I feel is important about these four statements is that we in agriculture have make sure that we advocate for our very way of living, each and every day. Farmers and ranchers need to tell their story, and it is a great story to tell. Consumers are much more informed that they were just a few years ago and they want to know about what their food is and where it comes from. We cannot afford to let others, who do not understand - or have an agenda that for some reason is anti-agriculture, to mold the thinking and dialogue about what we produce.

You hear constantly about the question of – "Do you as a farmer or agri-businessman have a 15 second elevator speech about what you do and how important it is to our society?" Can you sit down and have a fact or science based discussion with individuals who are one or more generations removed from the farm and have had their view of what we do obscured by the messages brought to them by things like Food Inc. Chipotle's, PETA, HSUS and so many others who call us "Big Ag" or "Factory Farms? Can you express how hard we work to provide safe and healthy food for their table? Can you convey to the masses how the farmer has always been the original caretaker of the soil and animals and that "sustainable" originated on the family farm? We have a solid tradition and we have a huge undertaking to feed and clothe their families!

Agriculture provides almost everything we eat, use and wear on a daily basis. But too few people truly understand this contribution. This is particularly the case in our schools, where students may only be exposed to agriculture if they enroll in related vocational training. By building awareness, I would hope that we can be encouraging young people to consider career opportunities in agriculture. Each American farmer feeds more than 150 people ... a dramatic increase from 25 people in the 1960s. Quite simply, American agriculture is doing more - and doing it better. As the world population soars, there is an even greater demand for the food and fiber produced in the United States. We must not forget that!

A lot of people know the commercial featuring a couple of camels about "Hey Mike, do you know what day it is?" Well I am going to change that a bit and say..."Hey consumers, do you know what week it is?" Join the celebration of agriculture as we celebrate National Agriculture Week! Why not? Agriculture is everywhere! Take a look around and ask, where did this come from? Whether it is food, clothing, shelter, transportation, personal and household items, medications, or school supplies, what we use in our daily lives has a connection to agriculture.

Agriculture is important to the economy not only hear in Nebraska but the nation. Today's farmers grow more food and do it with fewer resources than any other time in history. Consumer demands change and farmers work hard to meet those needs by providing an increasing variety of goods. According to the United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, technology and innovation in agriculture allows one U.S. farmer to provide enough food and fiber for 154 people. Farms come in all sizes. Some are highly specialized while others are diverse. Did you know that 97 percent of the farms in the United States are family owned? They are "Family Farms"! Statistics show farm families make up less than 2 percent of the U.S. population, yet they provide for themselves and the other 98 percent. That is just amazing.

As consumers shop for food, clothing and other essentials, it is easy to overlook the fact that agriculture and the farmer play an important role in making these items available. Grocery shelves are filled with an overwhelming number of food product choices, restaurant menus are filled with delicious offerings and racks of clothing beckon us. Yet, many people fail to connect the dots to realize farmers are the source of their supply of food and much more. Consumers in the U.S. spend less than 10 percent of their disposable income on food, based on USDA figures. That amount is less than any country in the world. What is amazing is that we not only have the most plentiful, but we have the safest food in the world.

When you think about it farming is about more than just food. From medical items to manufacturing and construction, agriculture is part of the formula. Seldom do we stop and ask ourselves, "Where did this come from?" We don't think about the hard work and risk that is involved each and every day. Instead of denigrating the very hands that provides us with all that we have, we should praise them. Farmers and what they provide should not be taken for granted. Farmers are not the type to toot their own horn, so all of us who benefit from the labor of the land need to applaud them, speak up and honor them. We should be able to stand up and answer Mike.... We know what week it is..... National Ag Week!!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or UNL Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, UNL Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>