

Agriculture is important to more than just farmers

Agriculture: Celebrating Its Horsepower

From a team of horses in the early 1900s to tractors with the power of 40 to 300 horses today, American farmers provide consumers with more and better quality food than ever before. In fact, one farmer now supplies food for more than 130 people in the United States and abroad compared with just 25.8 people in 1960.

The efficiency of American farmers pays off in the price American consumers pay for food as well. U.S. consumers spend roughly 9 percent of their income on food compared with 11 percent in the United Kingdom, 17 percent in Japan, 27 percent in South Africa and 53 percent in India. This great value is due in large part to improved equipment efficiency, enhanced crop and livestock genetics through biotechnology and conventional breeding, and advances in information management.

All Americans are asked to enjoy and admire the wonders of American agriculture as National Agriculture Day is celebrated on March 20.

Equipment Changes Boost Farm Output

Today's farmers work nearly three-and-one-half times more land than their predecessors from 1900. Their needs are different, the crops are different and the rules governing production practices are different.

"There is an on-going consolidation in agriculture that results in fewer farmers farming more acres," says Doug DeVries, Sr. Vice President Agricultural Marketing for North America, Australia and Asia at John Deere in Moline, Ill. "Their needs for equipment are changing. Their expectations for what the equipment will do for their farming operation are also changing."

Biotechnology Increases Capacity, Product Quality

Biotechnology is another factor in the efficiency of American farmers and their ability to provide more, higher quality food and livestock. Biotechnology provides benefits similar to traditional plant and livestock breeding, but does so in a more controlled environment and with faster results.

Advancements made in plant biotechnology provide consumers with better quality products in many areas. And those benefits are

just beginning. There are many products in the biotechnology research pipeline that will provide better livestock feed resulting in leaner meat for consumers. Many of these same products will lessen the environmental impact of livestock production, by reducing waste and/or the chemicals found in animal waste.

Pharmaceutical companies are actively working with farmers to develop crops that can go directly from the field to pharmaceutical production — eliminating some of the processing steps that occur in today's operations. This research will significantly reduce the costs required to produce many life-saving drugs.

New Uses Benefit Consumers, Farmers Alike

Research and technology advancements have also resulted in new uses for commodity crops like corn, soybeans and various grains. Use of products like ethanol and soy-diesel will reduce American independence on fossil fuels and improve air quality throughout the United States and the world. Ethanol is the largest industrial use of these commodity crops, but soy-diesel and other uses are emerging every year. According to DeVries, resins from corn and soybeans are used in some of the panels that go into John Deere equipment. "We've really just seen the tip of the iceberg in the use of renewable resources," says DeVries. "The more we can use commodity crops in industrial applications, the better off we'll all be."

Programs, Technology Preserve Environment, Advance Productivity

American agriculture can also be celebrated for its efforts in environmental conservation. Farmers and ranchers provide food and habitat for approximately 75 percent of this nation's wildlife. The current farm bill has provisions for farmers to create environmental habitats that will ensure protection of the land and water resources of this country.

Farmers use computer and satellite technology to map their

fields for production inputs. This increases yields and reduces crop inputs like fertilizer and crop protection chemicals. "Most farmers use some form of mapping process in their operations," says DeVries. With today's technology, farmers are better able to match seed characteristics and production practices to soil type and climate conditions. The result is higher yields with lower input costs from more efficient use of chemicals, fertilizers and tillage. Ultimately, that results in more food at a lower cost for consumers.

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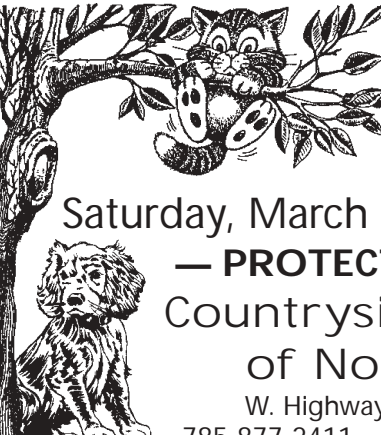
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