

November 2008

Extension Solutions for Homes and Gardens

by Paul J. Pugliese

“Thanksgiving for Farmers”

We can be doctors and lawyers, teachers and ballplayers, factory workers and carpenters -- even county Extension agents. We can be those things because our farmers feed us. If you're a "Baby Boomer" or younger, you weren't around in the "old days" when people's entire lives were structured around putting food on the table.

Even though my father grew up in the city, he chose to become a farmer and I had the unique experience of growing up on a family owned and operated farm in North Georgia. In contrast to those “old days,” today’s farmers are generally not as dependent on their own production efforts for putting food on the table. Advances in farming technology have made many farming tasks more efficient and higher yielding—allowing smaller farmers to produce more food! However, many small farmers today have to keep a second job “in town” just to keep the farm income stable. Nonetheless, this makes today’s farmer even more admirable for keeping food on all of our tables.

Now just think for a moment. If it weren't for our farmers, just about all of us would have stories to tell our kids about hog killing and having to work in the fields until all hours of the night. And we might be telling them that when we weren't working in the fields, we were preparing the next meal or preserving food for the winter.

As modern technology changed agriculture, farmers became more efficient. A hundred years ago, one farmer could feed only five other people. So folks had to grow their own food. Today's farmer feeds about 128 people on average. That allows the rest of us to choose the lifestyle we live without worrying about having to grow food to put on our table.

In today’s world, farmers are also an important part of our national security. Remember, food security is a form of national security. Many countries depend on the U.S. for food and we are still the bread basket of the world. Therefore, those countries that depend on the U.S. for food should have little desire to harm our country. I for one have no desire to depend on any other country to supply our food—our dependence on oil is bad enough!

About 98 percent of Americans are liberated from working the soil, and that makes it easy to forget how dependent we are on our farmers for food. People today have more free time to enjoy things like traveling, higher education, sports, recreation activities, and entertainment. Some might argue that this has both good and bad consequences. However, we all should remember that this “free time” is a privilege and not just an opportunity to be sedentary in front of technological gadgets, games, and other devices.

This holiday season, I encourage you to take your family outdoors to experience local farm life and have a greater appreciation of nature. The best way to thank your local farmers is to give them your support and your business. Take this opportunity to enjoy the nice fall weather, maybe cut your own Christmas tree or enjoy some farm-related recreation activities like horseback riding, hayrides, corn mazes, cookouts, and bonfires.

It's important for every American to know how very lucky we are to have the best farmers in the world working hard to grow and deliver the best food in the world to us every day. So this Thanksgiving season, enjoy your food. And appreciate all those who made it possible: our farmers. By supplying our food, farmers free us all to choose our own professions and lifestyles.

Paul Pugliese is the Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Agent for Cherokee County Cooperative Extension, a partnership of The University of Georgia, The U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Cherokee County. (770) 479-0418. For more information, visit our local website at www.ugaextension.com/cherokee