

Agriculture – then and now...

Despite the high-tech society that we live in – complete with computers, Sport Utility Vehicles, DVD players, and other electronic gadgets – there is still one fact that remains certain. Without farms, we wouldn't have any food. The agricultural industry is still the cornerstone of any modern nation.

In the United States, agriculture remains the nation's largest employer. Even though less than 2% of American people still live on farms, about 20% work in some phase of the industry. This includes everything from packaging and shipping the food to selling it in the supermarket. The statistics aren't that surprising when you consider that the average American spends around \$2,000 each year for food (*and Americans spend the lowest percentage of their income on food than anywhere else in the world*).

Today, less than 3% of the population in most industrialized nations work directly on farms. In the last century, larger corporate farms have replaced the family farms in modern nations. The statistics are much different globally, however. Almost 50% of the entire world's population still work in agriculture, with that number far exceeding 60% in many Third World nations.

With new fertilizers and techniques, as well modern equipment and machinery, the efficiency of the agricultural industry has skyrocketed. For example, it once took about 40 labor hours and several acres of land to produce 100 bushels of corn by hand. Now, the same amount can be harvested on one acre in two and a half-hours. In industrial nations, this has allowed people to move away from the farms and develop new industries.

In the future, the obvious goal will be to continue to produce more food using less land, less labor, and less money. There will certainly be advancements in equipment, fertilizer, and technology to make the goal obtainable. But it may be too early to celebrate. Some argue that the agricultural industry is getting too good too

fast. In other words, new fertilizers and pesticides, which have been proven to increase crop yields, may have an inverse effect on food safety and the environment. The same is true for new supplements being created for livestock. Producing food quickly and efficiently isn't enough. It is also a focus of the agricultural industry to produce food safely.

There's more. Farmers are also interested in creating *better* food. With advancements in food genetics, as well as in fertilizers, more durable and healthier crops are already being produced. In the future, you may be able to buy a tomato that stays fresh for a year and has the same amount of protein as a steak. The same attention is being focused on livestock. Recently, "Mad Cow Disease" has threatened the health of cattle around the world. It also lowered consumer confidence in the quality of beef. Obviously, experts in veterinarian medicine are looking for ways to maintain durable livestock.



There is a new group that might help shape the future of the agricultural industry – the vegetarian. A vegetarian diet can be very healthy, but it can also be more challenging. While a steak is a great source of protein, a vegetarian must have to look elsewhere. An increased focus has been placed on substitute meats (*often made from a diverse crop like soybeans*) to help a vegetarian or vegan maintain a balanced diet. In the coming years, there will undoubtedly be more (*and hopefully tastier*) options for individuals on specialized diets.
