

What Farms Are For

by Jeff Poppen

We need farms for a wide variety of reasons. The domestication of cattle and the dawn of agriculture gave birth to the rise of civilization and the growth of human culture. Much of the work was done by slave labor. As consciousness expanded, hired labor became the norm. Farms are at the cutting edge of a future where people donate labor out of love for their work and each other. As the old saying goes, “you don’t count your labor on a farm,” meaning farmers love their whole lifestyle while not regarding money as the most important aspect of it.

Although the farmer gets just a few pennies from the dollar we spend on our daily bread, the rest of the dollar is widely distributed. Farms create jobs. For every 6 or 7 farms in a neighborhood, one business sprouts up in town. There are lots of tasks involved in turning farm products into food, clothing and shelter. But the farm is the place where it all starts, where the miracle of photosynthesis annually creates new wealth from sun, air, water and earth. Filling needs with the least effort is true economy. The market economy relies on the productivity of farms.

Healthy farms are good for the environment and less likely to become subdivisions. A farmer’s care for the land is reflected in the scenery. A drive through the countryside uplifts the spirit; instinctively we still feel inwardly secure when we see crops, animals and the potential for next year’s food supply. Local food production consumes less energy and recycles carbon, nitrogen and other nutrients. The diversity of plants and livestock on a farm is mutually sustainable, and good farmers conserve and preserve soil and water as if their lives depended on it.

Farms offer amazing educational opportunities. A simple lesson like “you reap what you sow” becomes much more real when you’ve planted the wrong type of bean seed like I did last year. Cause and effect, barnyard animal antics, pond ecology, the continual changing of the seasons, and all of the natural processes happening on a farm teach a morality and practicality largely unavailable in modern education. Willpower and work ethics are enhanced by farm life.

Farms are fun places to visit, for camping, hiking, swimming, hunting and other entertainment. Communities form around farms, with picnics and bonfires, family and friends. A net is created for the less fortunate, handicapped and older folks. Nature’s display of interesting insects, colorful forests and industrious wildlife never ceases to amaze and amuse.

America stands at an interesting point in time now, importing most of its food from other countries, and promoting an unattainable and highly toxic agriculture here. There are more Americans today in prison than there are Americans who are farmers, a fact we would have found unimaginable a few generations ago when the prison population was way less than one percent of the farming

population. Thomas Jefferson, among many others, believed that small farmers and small businesses were necessary for democracy. Farms certainly provide more freedom than other lifestyles, and allow people to supply their needs without the global economy and all of its social and environmental ramifications.

So, we need farms for economic reasons, for a healthier environment, for education, and for their social value as well. And there's one other reason we need our farms – to give us this day our daily bread.

Jeff Poppen, known as the Barefoot Farmer, is currently doing an organic farming series for the local Nashville PBS affiliate. Jeff, producer of a successful community supported agriculture venture, is available for consultation to aspiring organic and biodynamic farmers. He is especially interested in getting small farmers and gardeners started in their own healthy food production. For more details visit barefootfamer.com. This article has been provided courtesy of the Green Living Journal, a project of the Center for Holistic Ecology and the Cumberland Green Bioregional Council.