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Editorial - Farmers take deserved turn in the spotlight

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Governor Mark Dayton has proclaimed March 13-19 as Minnesota Agriculture Week. The designation is an effort to raise awareness of the positive and important contributions agriculture makes to Minnesota's economy and its people.

When some people think of farmers, they imagine someone out toiling in a field, leading a simple life of living off the land. Some farmers do just that, but collectively, they do a lot more.

Consider the economic clout they provide: Nearly one in five jobs in the state is linked to agriculture. And according to the U. S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service, Minnesota agriculture generated \$13.3 billion in farm income and \$4.3 billion in exports in 2009.

Minnesota Department of Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson says it is appropriate and important to recognize an industry that contributes so much to the overall health and well-being of Minnesota.

"Minnesota's farmers and ranchers care deeply about the world around them," said Frederickson. "These men and women work hard each day to make sure we have safe and wholesome food to eat, they help protect the environment, and they brave the elements so their animals are cared for and well fed."

Farming is no longer only a tradition that some families pass down generation to generation. It's a science – one that is constantly evolving in classrooms and colleges nationwide. The technical aspect of agriculture has helped farmers become more productive than ever before. The 144 families mentioned at the top of this editorial is a huge surge from the 25 people the average farmer could feed in the 1960s.

Agricultural leaders point out that as the world population increases, there is an even greater demand for the food and fiber produced in the United States. Agri-Growth President Daryn McBeth issued the following statement in connection with Agriculture Week: "Obviously our organization values the agriculture and food industry every day, but it's very exciting to see people from all industries getting involved and sharing the message of how critical agriculture is to Minnesota and the U.S. overall. The word 'agriculture' now means so much more than ever. This unique industry – comprised of farmers, food processors, energy producers, transportation, manufacturing, and so much more – bears a heavy burden of trying to feed the equivalent of two Chinas over the next 40 years: 2.6 billion more people. And the agriculture industry is rising to this challenge while protecting the environment and improving sustainability. This week serves as a reminder to everyone on the importance of agriculture and the respect and support the industry needs and deserves. America's farmers live on the land they tend and care for the environment; they provide a fresh, safe and a secure food supply; and they are critical to the health and well-being of our economy."

So the next time you flip that steak on the grill or reach for a cold glass of milk, think of the work, science and safety that went into it. And thank a farmer.

Tags: opinion, editorial