

Thanksgiving 2012

As we wind down an ambitious campaign season of polls and surveys and anticipate gathering with family and friends to celebrate our blessings and to enjoy a delicious Thanksgiving dinner, I am reminded of an article my friend Don Sproul shared with me. The author of said article wrote of the impact agriculture is having on our economy and its impact on the daily standard of living we have come to enjoy. The writer explained that civilization as we know it could not have evolved, nor can we prosper without an adequate supply of food. The article concluded with the declaration that "100% of those surveyed said eating food is important".

Rarely, if ever, have any of us been forced to bed hungry. Some among us are less fortunate, but we all have opportunity to assist and lift where needed. The construction and management of the local food pantry is one example of a united effort to share our abundance with those less blessed. I commend those who organize efforts to lift others. Unfortunately, many of us seek more "things" without fully appreciating the abundant blessings we already have.

I like the insight of Melody Beattie who wrote; "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend....Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

I am reminded of a conversation with a friend who had been reading some family history. His ancestors came to this country in the mid 1800's and helped settle parts of Cache County. As he read about their privations he felt profound gratitude for the comforts of life he currently enjoys. He was especially impressed with recurring entries in his ancestor's journals which reported the abundance of food in this country. These early settlers even sent letters back to their homeland encouraging other family members to come because "we have food to eat".

The holidays are a good time of year to consider what a profound blessing it is to have food to eat. Food is the focal point of most holiday gatherings. Most of us eat more than we need but we enjoy the experience none the less. America's farmers and ranchers continue to provide the safest, most abundant, most affordable and most convenient most diverse supply of food anywhere in the world. Food in the United States is a blessing we generally take for granted. Even with rising prices, food is a real deal.

For as long as we can remember, those of us in American agriculture have been told that it is up to us to feed a growing world population. We must become more efficient and more productive in order to provide nutrition for people in all corners of the world. After all, there is only so much land and water and other natural resources. Even as we deal with well-fed critics, U.S. farmers have ramped up food production while leaving a smaller environmental footprint.

According to the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization, world demand for food is expected to double within the next 40 years. The earth's population is projected to grow from today's 7 billion to 9 billion-plus. Worldwide living standards are predicted to increase with global demand for meat and

dairy products almost doubling during that period. It has taken civilization 4,000 years to develop a food production system that is barely feeding the present population. Current production models will not keep up with anticipated demand.

Total agricultural output has increased by nearly 50% over the past three decades, even as resources like land, labor, fertilizer and pesticides have declined. Those changes have resulted in environmental benefits, shrinking the environmental footprint for the average unit of agricultural output. In order to survive economically, U. S. agriculturists have been forced to seek efficiencies. The result is larger, well managed, proficient facilities. Smaller operations are limited by restrictions on labor and management. Poultry, pork and dairy farms are much bigger and more specialized now than they have ever been. That trend will certainly continue.

I am personally grateful for the multitude of blessings we enjoy in this peaceful valley. Among those blessings is access to clean, pure water and a safe, abundant, and affordable supply of food each day. I hope our society will never be forced to go hungry, and I hope the populace will allow agriculturalists to do what they have learned to do best. Happy Thanksgiving to all who read this article!