

America's economy needs farmers

Written by John R. Stulp, Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture

This week we commemorate American agriculture and the benefits it brings to our society, our economy and our environment. But most of all, we celebrate the productivity of our nation's farmers and ranchers. Governor Ritter has declared March 20, 2009 as Agriculture Day in Colorado.

While farmers and ranchers constitute less than two percent of our population, they feed our entire country and a good number of consumers overseas. The productivity of our agricultural industry is astounding, and scientists continue to explore new frontiers of crop and livestock technology, which will bring even greater productivity to feed a growing world population.

Agricultural productivity is more important in today's economy than ever. Americans spend only about nine percent of their income on food. That compares nicely to 11 percent in the U.K. and 17 percent in Japan. Food is a bargain in America, freeing more of a consumer's paycheck to pay for other necessities, and maybe even a splurge once in a while.

A farmer receives only a small portion of every food dollar. For instance, a pound of boneless ham might sell for around \$4.50, and the farmer's share of that is less than 70 cents. A bag of potato chips costs about \$3, but the farmer gets only six cents of it. A \$2.50 loaf of bread contains only eight cents worth of wheat—about the same value as the plastic wrap it comes in.

United States agriculture will have to become even more productive as the world's population increases. Demographers expect the world's population to grow to nearly 10 billion people by the year 2050. That population will need ten billion tons of food to survive—twice as much agricultural production as farmers currently provide.

Where will all that food come from? Dr. Norman Borlaug, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who is credited with saving a billion lives by creating the "Green Revolution" through agricultural research, believes farmers could produce that much food today. Borlaug believes that research in agricultural technology is the key to keeping food production in line with population growth.

We are fortunate as Americans to have farmers and ranchers that work their fields and care for their livestock on a daily basis to allow us consumers to have access to the safest, most economical, and the most dependable source of food, fiber and fuels in the world.

Even in difficult economic times, America's agricultural producers continue to undergird the economy with products that touch every American every day.

This Ag Day, there is much to celebrate.

John R. Stulp was named agriculture commissioner by Governor Bill Ritter. He farms and ranches south of Lamar.