



*A turtle pokes its head from beneath the lily pads in the pond.*

My Daddy was one of those men. Farming was a career that demanded attention 365 days a year. He could work for several months only to have a complete crop and his one annual paycheck devastated by rain or pests or drought. When he was asked why he didn't like to gamble he'd retort that being a farmer meant that every day was a gambling day. He didn't have to go to the tables to wrestle with Lady Luck.

From the time my siblings and I could toddle, we worked the fields. As our age and abilities grew, we were given more responsibilities. By 8 years of age, we all drove tractors, plowed the vineyards, picked fruit, and worked the harvest. We always knew where our food came from because as farmers, we planted, weeded, watered, tilled, mowed, hauled, mulched, fertilized, pruned, sprayed, protected and harvested, then started the process all over again prepping for the next season of crops.

There have been surveys done around the world asking children to explain from where their food came. Responses in the United States included that cucumbers come wrapped in plastic, eggs come from cartons, peas are found in the freezer, and chocolate milk is from brown cows. Recently, 27 percent of Australian kids in their final year of primary school believed that yogurt grew on trees while 75 percent thought cotton socks came from animals. In England, one-third of the country's children thought fish sticks came from pigs or chickens, tomatoes grew underground, potatoes grew on bushes, and cheese was raised on plants. More disturbing was the majority of children stated that everything originates in the supermarket. Unfortunately adults didn't fare much better in surveys. These statistics reflect poorly on the intelligence of citizens in first world countries. We need to do better educate our public of where our food is grown, how long it takes to grow, and the hazards that farmers face.

America was an agrarian society until the early 1900s. Now we are a technology-focused country. As of the last census, only 1 percent of Americans are farmers. I commend the schools where gardening is part of the curriculum. We can all become more appreciative of the growing cycles when we become knowledgeable, and even more so when we become home farmers ourselves.

We have the responsibility to involve our children in the growing process by giving them the opportunity to plant, water, and tend to fruits, vegetables and herbs. Besides being a superb science lesson, children will develop an appreciation for farm freshness and feel a sense of achievement and accomplishment. An added benefit is children enjoy eating what they grew. Thankfully, there has been a renaissance in learning the skills of canning. Baking pies from scratch is becoming fashionable again. As a child, "putting up" our fruits and vegetables for winter consumption was a fun family affair, one I passed on to my children, and hope that one day they will pass it on to their progeny.

The next time you bite into a peach – fresh, dried or canned – say a little prayer of thanks for the extraordinary efforts that went into its development. Farmers are the foundation of our civilization and we need to honor and respect their art. It's time we get back to our roots.

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