



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

A bridge to learning

“Burn down our cities and leave our farms and the cities will spring up again as if by magic, but destroy our farms and grass will grow in the streets of every city in America!”

— *William Jennings Bryan, 1896*

From field to market

As Todd and I pick green beans, tomatoes and peppers out of our overstuffed patio garden just across a stubborn cornfield from a Walmart and Lowe’s, I’m reminded of that quote I used in a speech during my FFA career. One of my favorites, the speech focused on the importance of agriculture to the U.S. economy and to feeding the world.

Here we are, some-odd years later, and that same message still needs to be told. Cities cannot thrive without agriculture.

As the Obama administration’s stimulus package was put into action, the first project to receive support, \$200,000, was the repair of an old bridge in a rural community here in Missouri. Newscasters covered a Saint Louis politician up in arms that the money would be spent on “a bridge to nowhere.”

The Route 17 bridge over the Osage River near Tuscumbia serves a town of only 200 people, reports said, ignoring the surrounding farming community that uses the bridge to transport farm commodities. Built in 1933, the bridge had been closed to large trucks since 2007 due to structural problems.

The politician spoke of how many people could be better served with dollars spent in an area, like Saint Louis, where more people would be affected. As the television news cameras showed a small grain truck rambling down the road and proclaimed how remote the area was, I couldn’t help but wonder just how many people would indeed be affected by each load of grain crossing that river. After all, cornflakes, eggs and milk don’t just come from the storeroom.

Tuscumbia is the county seat for Miller County, which in the 2007 ag census boasted 1,080 farms with a total value of ag products sold of \$95.3 million (\$3.8 million from crops; \$91.6 million from livestock and their products).

This is one bridge. The stimulus package contributed \$200,000 to an \$8.5-million project. Small potatoes.

The worrisome part is the lack of understanding that would cut a population off from its food supply.

The up side is the fact that we have a patio garden. No, not because it is going to feed us; it may even cost more than going to Walmart. But I think it signifies something

within us. Even if we’re not currently in a position to have 100 cows in the pasture behind the house or to grow corn and soybeans, we want to be farmers in some small way.

We in agriculture may scoff at our urban cousins for joining community garden clubs or buying from a farmer’s market, but we need to see the desire to stay connected to agriculture as an opportunity. Whether it is feeding the pigeons in the park, hoing a community garden or picking peppers, this innate desire leaves a door open to education. Our challenge is finding the most effective educational vehicles to create understanding that what happens to agriculture happens to each and every one of us.

After all, even in America, what’s more important than feeding your family?

Sideline

CNN’s Bob Greene reported in early August that U.S. Postmaster General John Potter has gone to Congress to request ending Saturday mail delivery. The move, Greene reported, would save more than \$3 billion a year. In its current fiscal year, he says, the U.S. Postal Service is expected to lose \$7 billion.

Greene noted that ending Saturday delivery has been tried once before, in 1957. After no mail was delivered April 13 of that year, a public outcry caused Dwight D. Eisenhower to sign a bill to provide further funding to the agency and Saturday delivery was reinstated.

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