Feeding the World
by Garth Woodruff

We have a father of industry, we have a father of modern medicine, we have a father of almost everything but who is the father of agriculture? Interesting debate. Adam... or Cain and Abel as they were the ones to first reap and sow, both plant and animals, in a fallen world? How about nomads if that’s your liking? Men hunted, it was the women who gathered and likely gardened at first. So maybe the father of agriculture is a mother? And, exactly when and who was that? I suggest it would be a fine debate for a winter evening around the fireplace.

What isn’t debated is that agriculture is considered to be the beginning of societies. It stopped the roaming of clans and settled people in one place where they raised crops and animals for sustenance. As others joined in for this easier new way of feeding ones-self, a village would soon spring up then a town, before long cities. And to trace back even American agriculture I find myself struggling to place a start date.

We know that Columbus was looking for an easier route to the Indies when he found this fertile land. Very soon sugar cane, tobacco and other crops were being shipped east. However, that wasn’t America as we know it now, it was Great Britain and Spain. At that point on our east coast agriculture dominated our exports. England was tired of buying wine from France, who they were regularly at war with, and was finding their cities crowded and in need of food. This soon became their demise. For a great deal of the Colonies reasons in sparking a revolution was England’s handcuffs on agricultural exports.

In the first week of July 1776 America, after a year of already being at war, declared independence. In that Declaration many facts are stated, to prove to the world, that King George III was abusing his colonies. One “absolute Tyranny” was “For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world”. The French and Dutch traders wanted New England rum. England wanted Carolina’s Pine, France wanted Virginia’s tobacco and southern Europe wanted South Carolina’s rice and indigo. We had products in demand and Great Britain’s coffers were struggling for the control.

Thomas Jefferson said in his Memorandum of Services to My Country (1800), “the greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add an useful
Jefferson was a great American farmer and still shrinks in the long history of American agriculture with folk like Eli Whitney, George Washington Carver or John Deere, to only mention a few, who edge to the top. Yes, American agriculture has struggled and evolved. As we see it today it is evolving yet.

This last week Dan Charles did a piece on American farmers saying they ‘feed the world’. It was the segment on NPR just after I was reminded that healthy eating was the magic pill everyone is looking for. ‘American Farmers Feed the World’ - a slogan in the industry for some time now. Gaining great political power and harnessing funding into the billions. $80 billion, to be exact, is the number on the table for the current budget that is being battled over in DC this week. But is the American farmer feeding the world? NRP points out that, forty percent of our largest crop (corn) goes into fuel. The majority of the second largest crop (soybeans) is fed to animals. These large crops that American farmers are producing, we come to realize, are extremely low in the nutrients that the truly hungry crave. So, the saturation of corn into the world markets drives down the cost of corn meal making it more affordable for impoverished folk to buy. In turn depriving them of fresh fruits and green vegetables. Which drives the first nod to ‘feeding the world’. The second nod comes from our fine capitalist system. The American people aren’t fooled. We realize a system that has worked till now may not last forever. We were raised on the adage, ‘give a man a fish and he eat a meal, teach a man how to fish and he eat the rest of his life’. And as we start to shift the paradigm of our own health and food awareness we begin to connect the dots to the millions that don’t have that opportunity. Our farmers have a great deal of pride in their slogan and we have pride in them. But as we all progress into a flatter world market we collectively realize that things may change. Which is why Charles Arnot, the CEO for the Center for Food Integrity, suggests that farmers are going to need to find another message and that they need to show the way they grow food is consistent with American consumers. Yes, the American consumers and likely the American taxpayers, drive the market.

Who is the father of agriculture now seems almost superfluous as we realize that the question to ask is, who is the father of agriculture in our post-modern world. Will America take that charge? Will we adapt? And, will we step up to the plate to protect the health of the earth and its people who live on it?

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Alumni Breakfast Join the agriculture department for an annual alumni breakfast at Smith Hall from 8:00am-11:00am, Sunday, September 29. All is invited. See you there!

Health & Fitness Expo Learn. Play. Interact. This event is designed to provide health and fitness information in a fun and interactive way for alumni, students, faculty, staff, community members, and families. Located at Johnson Gymnasium from 9:30am-1:00pm, Sunday, September 29. Garth will be one of the featured presenters.

Volunteer Come learn the wonders of the gardens through one on one interaction with students. Co-curricular credits are available for undergraduate students. For more information please email info@augardens.com

Apples Need apples in bulk quantity? $16.00 a half bushel. Email for more information.

Recipes Do you have any favorite or family recipes? Please share your recipes to all. Email the recipes along with a picture to info@augardens.com.

Baskets Please return your basket upon your next delivery.

Free Range Eggs Free Range Eggs are available for $3.00 from Redbarn Farm in Buchanan, MI. Eggs are limited; first come, first serve. To order eggs for your next delivery please email <info@augardens.com>