

## MEADOWLARK EXTENT DISTRICT WEEKLY NEWS FROM AGENTS

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Where Does Your Food Come From?

This is a talk that I've created for kids, since we are two or three generations removed from the farm, it's important that they know how their food is made. Someday, they will be our consumers and making their own decisions in the grocery store, or more likely at the fast food place.

Livestock production has changed dramatically in the last 50 years. Farms have gone from mixed crop and livestock operations to specialized livestock operations. Economic factors- the cost of land, labor, capital and environmental regulations—have brought about these changes. The cost of labor and land per animal fell dramatically while capital investment and environmental costs increased. Farms with small herds or flocks yielded to large specialized farms with larger animal concentrations.

Before 1950, farms had many different crops, including hay and pasture, as well as many types of animals, cattle, hogs and chickens. In the twenty first century, there are large specialized farms: dairies, beef feedlots, hog operations, and chicken and turkey houses. These operations use smaller land areas, and can be managed with smaller amounts of labor. The result is animal facilities where all the best health controls are available and applied to keep the herds or flock healthy.

Technology has come to the farm, dairies know the daily and annual milk output for every cow in the herd. Beef farmers know the weight gain and feed conversion efficiency of every sire used in their breeding programs. Feedlot operators know the weight and gain, and the carcass value of every animal, poultry producers know the feed to meat ration of their broilers and the egg production of each hen.

Animals such as cattle, sheep and goats still graze land too rolling, too dry, or otherwise not suited for crop production. This is a question the kids often ask, "why don't we plant all the land to fruits and vegetables for people". I then explain the difference in crop production and that type of farming.

Cow/calf and sheep operations harvest the biomass that would otherwise be uneconomical to harvest.

Farm size has increased from 160 acres to more than 500 acres. The labor necessary to produce a bushel of corn decreased from more than thirty minutes in 1930 to a fraction of a minute. Availability of high powered well designed equipment; well adapted hybrids very precise weed, insect and disease control; improved plant and animal genetics; and improved animal health have all contributed to the revolutionary plant production. Biotechnology and computer revolutions enable us to manage large operations and design crops and animals that will be more nutritious in the future. Consumers are the major beneficiary of these developments since food purchases now require less than 1 percent of average income.

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