



It's not all fame and fortune

Every day, America's farm families rise to meet the challenge of feeding and clothing the world. Yet, there tends to be a misconception attached to the American farm family. We picture a merry, relaxed, happy-go-lucky couple and a yard full of kids surrounded by cherry red barns and content livestock.



But, when the role one takes on includes satisfying the world's demands and providing over 85% of the total crop production value in the U.S., one could say a little bit of stress accompanies the job. Not to say that the American family farmer is not merry and prideful, but I think it's time to give credit where credit is due: Farming is not an easy, tranquil task.

John Heeren of Pecatonica, IL has been farming with his grandfather Karl for many years. The Heeren family settled in German Valley in 1849. Heeren is the 6th generation on the farm. Other than adding a few bins, the original family farm would look very similar to past generations. The original barn and house are still there.

Heeren discussed a few of the struggles he faces everyday while pursuing his career as a full time farmer. "It's not as lush farming as some may think it is," said Heeren. "Markets are very tight. The inputs are expensive. Sometimes those enterprises we go through, like seed and chemical companies, come to more money than most of us make off of what we produce."

It is proven that farmers only receive a very small percentage of the income that comes from the products they raise that go on to be sold in a grocery store.

Heeren raises corn and soybeans. He knows how important it is to yield safe, low-cost, reliable products for consumers to enjoy. However, due to some consumers being so far removed from the family farm, Heeren faces the struggles of criticism and critique from worrisome consumers. He realizes the benefits that modern farming practices can have on his crops.

The agriculture industry as a whole is recognizing the necessity for consumer education. There is a growing need for farmers to become more transparent with the regular consumer. Consumers don't really know farmers like they want to, and farmers are realizing that. Farmers really want to share their day to day happenings with consumers and find a way to become easily available to answer consumers' Questions.

Heeren wants consumers to know that he believes that farmers are "raising the highest quality feed, grains, milk and cheese that are available in the world. I have visited a lot of places, including overseas and there is no place that eats as well as we do."

Farming, like any career, is not always glamorous. Farmers struggle financially and economically. Their days depend strictly on Mother Nature and the commodities markets. They feel the pressure of deadlines and due dates. But, they endure all of these struggles to offer harmless, dependable, and cost efficient food and fiber that we all depend on. So take the time to thank a farmer, who knows where we would be without them. (Published February 19, 2016)