

The term “farmer” enters one’s vocabulary at a very young age. Whether introduced in a book or a song, or on the television, children become familiar with the term. They connect a “farmer” to a person that raises animals and crops. This introduction at such a young age creates a strong foundation for one to learn the term “agriculture” in the future. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, agriculture is defined as the science or practice of cultivating soil, producing crops, and raising livestock and in varying ways the preparation and marketing of the resulting products. Though that may be considered an in-depth definition, it does not fully encompass the meaning of being a farmer and working in agriculture.

The role of a farmer entails far more than meets the eye. One may physically see a farmer care for livestock or crops, but they aren’t able to fully grasp the chain that their job follows. To completely understand all that the job of a farmer encompasses, one has to understand the food value chain. The food value chain begins with the farmers who grow the crops and raise the livestock. They then have to either process the crops and livestock on their own, or arrange for their products to be processed. After processing, the farmers arrange for their products to be distributed to different food services including stores and restaurants. The products are bought from the food services and used by consumers. Often times, the waste of the products after being used by the consumers is composted and then used by the farmers. A farmer’s job makes a complete circle. This food value chain is a supply chain with focuses on value-based practices at each level. At the farming level, this includes the well-being of the farm workers and environmentally friendly methods.

During the process of caring for crops and livestock, farmers must ensure that they are sustaining a healthy environment. “A sustainable agriculture is one that depletes neither the people nor the land”. This quote by Wendell Berry provides us with an idea that the farmers job

is not only to raise the livestock and crops to benefit the people, but also to ensure that their crops and livestock aren't depleting the soil. They may practice methods to promote soil health, minimize water use, and limit pollution which are critical methods in maintaining the environment that is necessary for agricultural practices. An important aspect of the farming business is ensuring that the agriculture environment farmers have today will last for years and years into the future.

It is extremely evident that technology provides a leap forward in every career field. As different machines and devices are created, production becomes quicker, easier, and more uniform. Like every other field, technology plays a major role in agriculture and practicing sustainable agriculture. Our environment is constantly changing due to the advances that occur in our country. Due to these constant changes, we have to use technological advancements to avoid falling behind. Farmers have been utilizing different agricultural technologies to adapt to the constant environmental changes. A few examples of these technologies are zero tillage, organic farming, and irrigation monitoring. These advances allow farmers to produce great crops while working towards sustainable agriculture.

Zero tillage is the process of avoiding ploughing their fields and using heavy machinery, which in turn prevents the excessive release of greenhouse gasses. The zero tillage method also decreases the amount of erosion and runoff that occur in the field, which leads to less pollution in nearby water sources. Through this method, farmers benefit the environment while also cutting costs for themselves. The organic farming process is using environmentally friendly methods to benefit both the soil and the consumers. Through this process, farmers use manure and other organic materials as substitutes for pesticides. Irrigation monitoring is a well-known process that has been used for years to save water. The farmers who use this method have to find the perfect

amount of water to supply to their crops. This amount needs to be the least amount needed to ensure a healthy yield. The less water used by the farmers for each crop, the more sustainable their agricultural practice is.

Beyond the everyday sight of plump livestock and fields rolling with thriving green crops, the role of farmers within the agricultural practice is abundant. They may not be involved in every aspect of their products beyond production, but they play the largest role in future agriculture. Farmers must know how to produce the amount and quality of products that consumers require, while also practicing environmentally safe and sustainable methods to ensure that there will be a future in agriculture. Whether we realize it or not, each and every one of us rely on the job of a farmer for our health, as well as the growth of our future environment.

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