



University of California Cooperative Extension – Kern County

NEWS RELEASE

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Food Production Around the World

Recent travels around the world to visit research stations, farming operations and food distribution systems have increased my appreciation of where we live and the abundance of inexpensive, healthy, safe and diverse foods that are available to us. Agriculture and food processing in the United States, and particularly California, are the most regulated of any where in the world. Yet within this system, we enjoy bounteous harvests of fruits, vegetables, food and fiber. Out of season, not a problem. What doesn't grow here, we import. All the while spending, on average, less than fifteen percent our monthly income on food. Forty-one percent of the world food source is rice and wheat. Other cereal grains account for twelve percent. The root crops, potato and cassava, seven percent. The other forty percent are the fruits, vegetables, nuts and meat, the foods that we enjoy on our dinner table.

The situation is very different in other areas of the world. The news media have reported on widespread starvation in war-torn countries and the effect of natural disasters around the world. Other places like the rural areas of Russia and China, Amazon jungle communities and the "favelas" of Rio de Janeiro, the people also want for food. Sustenance food production, growing barely enough on a couple of acres of land to feed their own family plus a little more to sell, is the norm. It's a full day's labor just to accomplish that. For natives of the Amazon, the main staple is cassava, a starchy root. To prepare it for consumption, the roots are grated, rinsed, wring out in palm leaf tubes and cooked in a large pan over an open fire. Various fruits, bananas, nuts and fish complete their diet.

In other parts of these countries, farming operations and food production are equivalent to the US. The use of modern technologies combined with favorable climate, soil conditions and abundant natural resources produce good yields of many crops.

There are many reasons why American agricultural production leads the world. A wide range of soils and climates across the country. Bounteous natural resources. Ingenuity in creating water projects for flood control, power generation and irrigation. Private ownership in a free enterprise system. And the insight of our predecessors to establish national, state and local entities to improve agricultural production and the quality of life for rural Americans. The Morrill Act of 1862 established Land Grant Universities, the Hatch Act of 1887 created Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension began with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. University and scientific information brought to the people through cooperative agreements and funding from national, state and county governments.

I visited an apple research facility in central Russia. Employed there were 50 scientists and 200 support personnel. Their mission was to develop new apple varieties, in which they were very successful. I enjoyed sampling many apple varieties with different tastes. They had also amassed lots of information about apple production but that information remained at the institute. Their only contact with growers was to sell them trees. There wasn't a system in place like Cooperative Extension to extend the information. University of California Cooperative Extension in Kern County is housed in the Farm and Home Advisor's office. Nine advisors, cover Nutrition, Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H and Youth Development, Agriculture Production, Entomology and Master Gardener. They are aided by thirteen office staff and technicians and various part-time employees to extend the University and information to the public.