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Brian Marsh, Farm Advisor
Cotton, Small Grains, Corn & Silage
(661) 868-6210

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 county. 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.