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Thanksgiving Appropriate Time For Better City-Farm Relations

THANKSGIVING is essentially an agricultural event. From ancient times, tribes, clans, communities and nations have celebrated their harvests with festivals and worship of their God, their gods and their idols, giving thanks for their food.

The first Thanksgiving of the American Pilgrims was such an occasion, and there was no overt hostility between consumers and producers, such as crops up frequently nowadays.

More than half of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were farmers, as were more than 90 per cent of all citizens of that time. They knew where their food came from.

As the nation grew in area, population and productivity, the number of farms and ranches increased, up until the mid-1930s. That was when farms began getting bigger in size and fewer in number. As the proportion of people who were non-farmers expanded, understanding of the importance of agriculture deteriorated.

Farmers and stockmen recognized this loss of understanding long before city people did, and after World War II leaders enlisted local bank-

ers, business men and civic clubs to develop farm-city days or weeks, which became annual events in many localities.

Twenty years ago, a number of these organizations formed National Farm-City Council, Inc., with headquarters in Chicago, to promote the event. This year, the 21st National Farm-City week is right now, November 21-27. Since it has not been made into a long weekend holiday, many people are totally unaware of it.

The Farm-City "Declaration of Interdependence" expresses the necessity of farm-city cooperation "to preserve the private enterprise system, work for wider public understanding of how our economic system functions, importance of looking to the private sector rather than to government for solutions to our economic problems, and the upgrading of the teaching of economics in the nation's schools, and restoring confidence in our American institutions."

A key factor in this nation's growth has been our agricultural progress, because it released millions of workers from the business of growing food to enter the businesses of manufacturing, processing, marketing and services.

Agricultural production also made it possible for many others to devote their time to the arts, ministry, education, government and entertainment. Yet, it is in these areas that farmers often encounter the least understanding and most misunderstanding of farming.

Today, professional, technical and managerial occupations make up 26 per cent of our labor force, clerical workers 18 per cent, semiskilled workers 17 per cent, and skilled workers only 13.5 per cent. Agriculture includes some of all these categories but still totals less than 5 per cent of our population.

Farmers feed 'em all, with more than 50 people depending upon each farmer for his food, with about 39 of them griping about it.

Agriculture is the only United States trade area that is "in the black" in international commerce. Farmers are keeping up this nation's balance of payments, while we import oil and all else.

Farm-City Week is needed, because our farm-city understanding is weak. Unless this improves, we may have less to eat.