

Agriculture Day a Celebration of American Farmers'

By Ferdie J. Deering

Monday is American Agriculture Day 1977. It will be celebrated with various activities in a number of states, but not to any great extent in Oklahoma.

Agriculture Day was launched in 1975 by agricultural marketing interests, farm organizations and civic clubs to honor those who raise our food and natural fibers.

This year, movie actor John Wayne is honorary chairman, probably because he has a big name rather than a big appetite. David Bennett, Minneapolis publishing firm executive, is chairman of the drive to tell everyone that "almost everything starts on a farm."

Naturally, the focus is on major consuming centers, because that is where social reformers

have concentrated their campaigns to convince consumers that food costs too much and that the American system to make a profit through free enterprise is a failure.

The fact is that American agriculture has succeeded extremely well in provid-

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ing families of this country from two to three tons of food each annually, high in quality, with variety to suit an assortment of tastes, at prices that are hard to beat.

Like most averages, populations of a year's supply of food might not fit any particular family, but based on many interviews, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has estimated

that a typical family's 2.5 tons of food may include: 694 lb. of meat and fish; 598 lb. of fruit; 1,136 lb. of dairy products; 1,154 lb. of vegetables; 592 lb. of grain products, and 349 lb. of poultry.

This food is available for about one-sixth of the family's disposable income, compared to nearly one-fourth of its income only a quarter of a century ago. Food costs more now, but incomes have risen faster than food has gone up.

It's a shame that people in other countries can't eat as well. Hunger, undernourishment and starvation are common in many places, and food costs are steep.

It is apparent that the ultimate solution to the world's hunger problems is to increase food output wherever

possible and practicable, and to improve distribution of food through trade.

Agricultural leaders point out that great land areas are now producing much less food than could be obtained from them and that a number of food-short nations are producing substantially below their potential ability.

Progress made by farmers in this country shows what many other countries might be able to accomplish.

Fifty years ago, U.S. farmers harvested 99.7 million acres of corn, got an average of 27 bushels per acre and produced 2.7 billion bushels, which they sold for an average price of 74 cents, according to the USDA.

Last year, American farmers harvested 71.1 million acres of corn, averaged 87.4 bushels per acre, produced 6.2 billion bushels and got

an average of \$2.37 per bushel for it.

That's 23 per cent less acreage, more than double the yield and more than twice as big a crop.

Look at wheat in Oklahoma. In 1926, farmers planted 4.4 million acres and harvested 17 bushels per acre (best of the decade), for a total of 73.6 million bushels. The crop brought an average price of \$1.16 per bushel.

For the 1976 crop, farmers planted 7.8 million acres, harvesting 24 bushels per acre from 6.3 million acres, for a total crop of 151.2 million bushels. Official average price figures are not available, but probably were around \$2.50 per bushel. Farmers insist this is below cost of production, but consumers have plenty of grain for food and there's a lot more.

The story is much the same for other crops

and for livestock. The American story is one of productivity. We have exported vast quantities of food to nations that are unable to feed themselves, much of it as gifts or on generous terms.

Still, the American people have been able to eat well at lower cost than families in most other countries.

Comparisons made a few months ago showed that a shopping basket of food containing 50 common items would cost \$252 in Tokyo, highest in the world. The same items would cost \$183 in Stockholm, \$175 in Geneva, \$167 in Oslo, \$154 in Frankfurt, \$142 in Paris and \$118 in New York City. The same basket would have cost slightly less in Rome and London at the time.

Flashbacks of newspaper ads show groceries in a downtown Oklahoma City market in 1924 were priced at 30 cents for a peck of potatoes, 49 cents for a pound of butter, 10 cents a pound for T-bone or round steak and 38 cents for a dozen eggs.

People who recall such prices often tend to overlook the low wage rates that prevailed, when many men worked six days a week, up to 10 hours a day, for as little as \$25 a week.

Consumers need to consider their food costs in relation to what they get in return for their own labor, but most important is the fact that we have ample food available.