FARM CITY DAYS

Fifty-five years ago, Kiwanis International and American Farm Bureau formed a coordinating council with the goal of bringing about a better understanding between rural and urban people by increasing their knowledge and appreciation of each other as partners in progress. Farm-City Week is a result of these efforts.

Representatives from a variety of agricultural and community businesses and organizations in Osceola County are making plans for the third annual Farm City Days. Activities to help youth and adults become more familiar with agriculture and issues of interest to rural and urban residents are planned.

With a 21.9% increase in population from 2000, Osceola County continues to be a leader in agriculture production. In 2002, Osceola County ranked No. 1 with 75,000 head of beef cows and No. 2 in total cattle and calves. Citrus is another major agricultural commodity produced locally with 14,313 acres of trees producing almost 6 million commercial boxes of fruit.

While the federal agriculture census for 2002 is not complete, more than 20 agricultural commodities produced in excess of 95 million dollars in income to the county. These commodities include: tissue-culture plants, sod production, retail and wholesale nurseries, watermelons, eggs, poultry, goats, sheep, hogs, timber, mulch, hay, production of tropical fish and aquatic plants, as well as cattle and citrus production. Numerous services are involved in the support of agricultural production.

With the average Florida farm being 232 acres, Osceola County has 485 ranches and farms with an average size of 1,259 acres. Farmers and ranchers have been stewards of the land for generations, protecting wetlands and preserving vast tracts of woodlands and water, improving game management and wildlife habitat.

Rapid population increase, urban growth, increased land values and effects of estate taxes are forcing farms to subdivide, affecting profitability and management decisions. In order to continue to be profitable, farmers and ranchers are being forced to diversify and manage resources more efficiently. Using technologies such as improved genetics and biotechnologies, they can produce commodities which are more nutritious, stay fresh longer and are not damaged by microbes and insects, reducing the need for pesticides and reducing waste and spoilage.

Whenever possible, buy locally grown or domestic produce and goods to support our local economy. The challenges the agricultural community faces affect us all, so it is important that we work together to achieve the common goal of providing food, fiber and shelter for our families and the world. Contact the extension offices for information about Florida-grown products and their availability.

Learn more about Osceola agriculture at Farm City Days, Nov. 14 and 15 at the Osceola Heritage Park on U.S. Highway 192 between Kissimmee and St. Cloud. Limited seating is available for farm tours from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Nov. 15. Call 321 697-3000 to reserve your seat. Educational exhibits are free and open to the public from 2 to 8 p.m. Nov. 14 and 9 a.m. to noon Nov. 15. A home-cooked steak dinner is available at 6 p.m. Nov. 15. Tickets are advance sale only for $10 per person. Join in fun and games for all ages from 10 a.m. to noon Nov. 15 at Family Farm Fun Day, which includes milking contests, sack races and an orange-juice squeeze-off. For dinner tickets, call 321 697-3000.

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