

I read a couple of days ago that California is issuing a new license plate that will tout our mammoth agricultural industry. I live in Cutten so was pleased to hear that the Cutten 4-H may benefit from the sale of these license plates, as will other FFA and 4-H clubs around the state.

Why not—celebrate California agriculture? As the article stated, Iowa is known for its corn, Wisconsin its cheese, Texas its cattle; they did not mention Idaho and potatoes, Washington's apples, Florida's oranges, and so on.

Californians often overlook the fact that we are the nation's leading farm state, with the current value of all California agricultural production c. \$32 billion dollars. Why aren't we more famous for our agriculture? Perhaps because our flashier industries like movies and high tech tend to garner media attention. But California farmers raise so much food and so many kinds of food that it is difficult to name the state for any single crop: what would it be? The dairy state? Grape state? Did you know that the grape industry: if you combine table grapes, raisins and wine, make up an industry larger than all the Hollywood studios combined? We also raise a whole lot of almonds, oranges, peaches, pistachios, olives, lettuce, tomatoes, dairy products, and well, California's farmers produce more than 400 different crops.

Guess what, that beautiful produce on the shelf did not come from the super market or neighborhood garden: farmers working hard from dawn to dusk produced it by sweat of brow, careful calculations and a bit of good luck. Farmers today must be some of the smartest, hardest working people in the world just to stay in business. I know, because my Dad was an orange farmer; I helped him fight every year to keep the trees watered and fertilized, weeds at bay, sometimes resulting in a good crop, other times to watch a crop freeze, or the prices hit the ground with a thud... Sadly, I've seen times when citrus prices were so low that the oranges or grapefruit did not even get picked, they simply were knocked to the ground and rotted, with hopes that the next year would see a better price.

Today's farmers have to know a lot about their field: computer print outs on every single milking cow is not all that uncommon at dairies. Collecting highly technical information from weather to markets and soil samples to fertilizers.... California farmers are providing the most essential item on earth: FOOD. People say housing or auto industries are the backbone of our economy. I say it's food. Starving people seldom buy cars or houses, or anything else for that matter. Without food you die, and the dead don't make an economy flourish.

Humboldt County is not the breadbasket that the Central Valley is, but it produces plenty of agricultural products, including dairy, floral, nursery, cattle and forest products: The top five crops, by value, 2011 produced just under 200 million dollars in 2011. These hard working farmers not only provide us with products vital to life, they also pay taxes. Imagine that.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment