

FOCUS ON AGRICULTURE

For the week of: June 20, 2011

American Farm Bureau Federation

Bringing ‘Garden to Table’ into the 21st Century

By Tracy Taylor Grondine

Many experts credit Thomas Jefferson as America’s first foodie. This is quite an accomplishment for someone deceased nearly 200 years prior to the commencement of the foodie movement. Yet, it is undeniable that Jefferson’s passion for gardening and food paved the way for the melting pot of fruits and vegetables found in American gardens today.

According to Peter Hatch, director of gardens and grounds at the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Jefferson’s “role in linking the garden with the kitchen into a cuisine defined as ‘half French, half Virginian’ was a pioneering concept in the history of American food.”

Fast forward several centuries and gardening expert P. Allen Smith is following in Jefferson’s footsteps. Quite literally. While majoring in garden history and design in England, Smith studied the same gardens also visited and studied by Thomas Jefferson in the 18th century.

Since, Smith has devoted his career to carrying on Jefferson’s legacy of ‘garden to table.’

According to Smith, because of today’s fast-paced lifestyles, consumers want to do what’s best for their families and homes, but don’t have the know-how that was once traditionally passed down from mother to daughter, father to son.

When it comes to raising and preparing food, Smith says consumers are “agri-curious.” They want to know more about their food and they yearn for a connection to the farm.

Smith, a country boy at heart, grew up farming, gardening and raising poultry in Tennessee. Now, through his PBS television series “P. Allen Smith's Garden Home” and the syndicated 30-minute show “P. Allen Smith Gardens,” as well as student workshops at his Arkansas ‘Garden Home Retreat,’ Smith is promoting the agri-lifestyle and carrying on his family’s farming tradition.

Smith’s newest endeavor, ‘Garden to Table,’ takes consumers several steps beyond raising food by giving them tips on harvesting, storing and preparing their fruits and vegetables. It is a practice that Thomas Jefferson refined for much of his life.

With quick and easy lessons like raising herbs, stringing sugar snap peas, storing Vidalia onions or preparing eggplant, Smith helps feed consumer’s agri-curiosity with “Food 101” and an appreciation for food and farming.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote that “the greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture.” Cultivating that plant and teaching consumers how to turn it into food, as does P. Allen Smith, may just be the second greatest service, especially in today’s ‘agri-curious’ world.

To learn more about P. Allen Smith's 'Garden to Table,' visit: www.pallensmith.com.

-30-

Tracy Taylor Grondine is director of media relations for the American Farm Bureau Federation