

FOCUS ON AGRICULTURE
For the week of: April 18, 2011
American Farm Bureau Federation

Fastballs and Farming Share Parallels of Spring

By Craig Fata

This time of year reminds one that baseball season is like farming. Now that Opening Day has come and gone and planters are starting to roll across much of the country, a number of parallels can be drawn.

In the spring, baseball teams hope all the work they did in the off-season pays off, and everybody, the Chicago Cubs included, holds out hope for a successful summer and a great result in the fall.

Farming is the same way. Growers put their seeds in the ground after lots of planning, preparation and scouting, and then they turn it over to nature—the same way a team's fate is mostly in the hands of the players after Opening Day.

There are certain things farmers can do to help their crops, in much the same manner there are certain strategic moves managers can make to help win baseball games. But, once you plant those seeds—or send the “hit-and-run” sign to the third-base coach—a lot of it is out of your control. It's going to be up to Mother Nature (or a guy hitting .220) whether you succeed.

And like baseball players, farmers hope for good weather. Too hot or too cold for too long and things can turn rough in a hurry. A good rain, especially during the dog days of August, is always welcomed by those with a crop in the field and season-weary ballplayers alike.

One way in which farming differs from baseball is in the rules of the game. The rules don't change very much in baseball. The game that's played today is essentially the same one that was played by Babe Ruth and Shoeless Joe. Sure, there's the designated hitter and the wild card, but if the Babe showed up at a sandlot or at Yankee Stadium today, he'd likely not miss a beat.

Farming, though, seems to have to adapt to new rules every year. Whether it's new permit requirements from a federal agency or new activist-driven state laws about how to care for animals, it seems like folks who farmed in the Babe's era might be awfully confused about how to jump through some of the man-made obstacles that confront today's farmers.

But, at the heart of all that is natural and good, baseball is still baseball, and farming is still farming. There is little doubt that Lou Gehrig could hit today, just as sure as our great-grandparents could be successful farmers if they were suddenly dropped in the middle of a fertile field and asked to tend a growing crop. It might take time to get used to the new equipment and some of the new rules and nuances of both occupations, but it all boils down to the natural part of getting a bat on a ball, and coaxing crops and animals to grow.

And in farming, like in baseball, if all goes right, you'll be successful in the fall. You might not have a champion harvest every year, but as long as you're competitive, it's usually a pretty good

season. As of now, the corn crop and the Cubs both have a legitimate shot at a season to remember.