

United We Eat

By Nathan Smith

More than 60 million people in the United States did this to celebrate the nation's birthday last year. Care to take a guess? Americans are great eaters, and from Alaska to Florida and California to New York, citizens are cleaning grills, stocking fridges and pantries, preparing for backyard cook-outs and family dinners, all thanks to the bounty produced by hard-working farm and ranch families.

Few other days on the calendar inspire a greater sense of American unity than July 4. We are reminded of the freedoms we enjoy and pay tribute to those who founded this country. We honor those who fight to keep our nation free and those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice. The holiday also offers an opportunity to examine just how much we depend on each other for the great selection of food we enjoy.

America's taste for food is as diverse as its population, yet without help from farmers in every state, dining on Maine lobster in Nevada or Washington apples in Kansas wouldn't be as easy. Here in the land of the free there is no set menu for Independence Day yet many families will be enjoying hamburgers and lemonade, peach cobbler and ice cream. No matter what the main course, there's a good chance items from multiple states in the Union will be on the table.

If beef is what's for dinner this weekend, there is a one-in-five chance it came from Texas. Maybe you'll eat chicken instead. Say thanks to states like Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina because there is a good chance those tender morsels found their way to your plate as a result of the work of farm families in the South. Or, how about pork from the Midwest, or lamb from the West? Enjoying fries or potato salad? Idaho potatoes are some of the best.

For another healthy addition to your holiday menu, a salad is always a great choice. California lettuce, Florida tomatoes and cheese from Wisconsin are just a few ingredients to start with. It wouldn't be "The Fourth" without watermelon and for that you can thank farming families in places like Arizona and Indiana.

No matter what's on the grill, in the oven or in the mixing bowl, Americans enjoy an abundant food supply, but more importantly, we can be secure in the knowledge that our food is among the safest in the world and grown by farmers dedicated to caring for our natural resources. These farm and ranch families strive to ensure the entire country enjoys the foods they grow. They depend on it. Ask a farmer or rancher what motivates them, and among the most frequent answers will be their sense of duty and pride in feeding and clothing the American people.

In addition to the diversity of selection and abundance, Americans enjoy year-round food options. Not long ago, purchasing fresh, tasty produce in the winter was not an option. Today, through safe, advanced farming methods, we are able to enjoy many foods no matter the season.

As this Independence Day comes around, take a minute to enjoy American-grown strawberries, knowing you can also do the same when snow is on the ground. As we commemorate our nation's birthday, celebrate also the blessing of our national bounty from all 50 states, regardless of the season or the holiday.