

FOCUS ON AGRICULTURE

For the week of: March 14, 2011

American Farm Bureau Federation

Students to Host 'Thank a Farmer Thursday' March 31

By Lynne Finnerty

When some of the dining halls at the University of Florida started adopting “meatless Monday” policies, as demanded by a small group of students who have taken up the animal rights cause, UF agriculture student Tera Black saw a positive opportunity to raise awareness about her chosen field.

Working through agriculture-based student organizations, Tera and several of her classmates are planning to host “Thank a Farmer Thursday” this coming March 31.

Students will spread out on campus and distribute fact sheets and brochures about how meat production—and all of agriculture—benefit our economy. They’ll provide food samples and pass out “Thank a Farmer” t-shirts. They also plan to have students sign large “thank you” cards to local farmers and ranchers.

The Alachua County (Fla.) Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee will be helping out with the event at the University of Florida, which is located in their county.

The anti-meat activists at the University of Florida probably don’t realize what they’ve started. The “Thank a Farmer” idea has now spread to campuses across the country. On March 31, students at several large universities will get a lesson in Agriculture 101, no matter what their majors might be.

“Hopefully, this will help students connect the food they eat and the clothes they wear to the people who provided them,” Tera said.

College students eat a lot of late-night pepperoni pizza, and “meatless Mondays” aren’t likely to change that. However, to Tera and her fellow ag students, this is about much more than whether someone orders a salad with or without grilled chicken.

“I think it’s more of an ethical issue,” Tera explained. Rather than increasing students’ food choices, she says, “it takes away a choice.” After all, students can already order a veggie burger any day of the week if they want.

While the “meatless Monday” fad got the ball rolling for Tera and her agriculture classmates, she says “Thank a Farmer Thursday” will be a larger, ongoing endeavor to educate the public about agriculture’s importance to our food security and economy. The students have founded an organization they’re calling AgFACTS, Inc., to keep the effort going beyond March 31. AgFACTS stands for “Agriculture: Feeding and Clothing Tomorrow’s Society.”

The college years are a time of self discovery and broadening horizons for most people. Students start to flex their political muscles, and activism at universities is nothing new.

A group of smart, energetic college students ready to stand up for farmers and ranchers and fight for the radical idea that we should be able to eat what we want, any day of the week? That is something you don't see every day. And, this totally student-led effort can make a positive impression at a time when young people are voting for the first time, deciding who they want to be and forming lifelong ideologies.

It looks as if "tomorrow's society" may be in excellent hands.

To learn more about "Thank a Farmer Thursday" and find out what you can do to help, search for "AgFACTS, Inc." on Facebook or send an e-mail to agfactsusa@gmail.com.