

America's Heartland: Bringing the Farm into the Family Room

By Tracy Taylor Grondine

America's Heartland, a nationally broadcast weekly program on agriculture, launched its fifth season earlier this month. The show's producers promise this season will be even better than the last four. And with the show's many new features, it's quickly living up to expectations.

A magazine-style, half-hour show, *America's Heartland* takes a look at American agriculture and the men and women who produce food, fuel and fiber for our nation and the world. Appearing on public television stations and RFD-TV, *America's Heartland* allows rural and urban viewers alike unprecedented access to informative, in-depth stories that are fun and fresh. The show literally brings the farm into viewer's family rooms.

This season the show offers a new, faster paced format, a larger reporting staff and new features, such as "Off the Shelf," which gives viewers information on the food they buy every week; "Harvesting Knowledge" that takes a look at the historical background of our favorite foods; and "Working the Land," which takes urban viewers to various farm fields to look at the specialized and sometimes dirty, demanding jobs of people working in agriculture.

Season five will also examine issues like food safety, animal welfare, urban farming, sustainability and environmental concerns. Take for instance a young couple in Arizona, who decided to become farmers in an unexpected career change. According to the show, they have two things in mind—growing local products and reducing the country's carbon footprint. Viewers will get to watch these new producers, who have absolutely no background experience in agriculture, lay down their roots by planting more than 6,000 pecan trees and five varieties of grapes.

In another segment, viewers will get a glimpse into challenges facing producers who are being pressured by urbanization in rural areas. To a tight-knit dairy farming family whose ancestors settled their Tennessee land in 1831, fighting to stay relevant and in business means diversification and a new way of doing business.

In the first four seasons of *America's Heartland*, the show covered all 50 states and even visited Taiwan and China to follow the journey of U.S. produced corn as it was made into cattle feed and even "plastic" cups. The show's producer says: "Back in 2005, we opened our first episode with the line '*America's Heartland* is more than a place; it's a state of mind.' More than 400 stories later, it's still true."

Season five promises to be no different. Stories will take viewers from Texas to Morocco, Nebraska to Egypt, and aboard planes, trains and boats. As always, agriculture is more than meets the eye.

America's Heartland has also dramatically expanded its social networking outreach with new online features on its website, www.americasheartland.org, on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), and an extensive channel of exclusive video offerings on [YouTube](#). One recent story has been viewed more than 1 million times.

America's Heartland is produced by KVIE Public Television with support from the Monsanto Company and the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Check your local public television station listing for *America's Heartland* broadcast times. Remember, you can also catch the show on RFD-TV on Wednesdays at 8 p.m. Eastern, and Sundays at 6:30 p.m. Eastern.