



The modern agriculture miracle

Water shortages and drought have become a part of the Utah psyche. We are the nation's second driest state. We live in a desert. We deal with extremes – temperature and precipitation. By definition, normal is an average of extremes. Therefore, half of the time we experience below average levels of precipitation. Below average precipitation somehow generates attacks on how valuable and judicious our state's family farmers and ranchers are in water use and a call to change our time-tested Utah Water Law.

The Provo Daily Herald (May 20) calls agricultural water a “bad trade” economically speaking and attacks Utah's “outmoded water law created in the 1800s.”

Utah's historic water law provides certainty in the marketplace. The arid west was transformed by our pioneer forefathers who had the vision to implement an efficient and productive food production system that we all continue to benefit from today. In the 19th century, developing and protecting water for agriculture was a matter of life and death.

Now, in the 21st century, the thought comes to mind, “Should we complain with our bellies full?”

Do we as American's take our food abundance and security for granted? Growing dependence on our energy needs is a convincing argument that America must maintain our domestic ability to produce critical resources. Food security for this nation is critical and Utah plays an important part. Offshore dependence leaves us vulnerable to shortages, purity concerns and contamination.

Production of food and fiber requires water. Because of the historic importance, water is a private property right that must be put to beneficial use. Food production continues to be defined as a beneficial use under Utah state law. Only farmers and ranchers historic vision to develop the state's water resources makes this an issue of debate today. Government policies, a tangle of federal laws and threat of lawsuits by radical environmental groups have made water development nearly impossible today.

Farmers and ranchers, like all Utahns, recognize the need for judicious use of our water resources. Inefficient flood irrigation practices are being replaced. Agriculture is investing millions of dollars in conservation measures. The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food's Agriculture Resource Development Loan Program has been working with Utah farmers and ranchers for over 30 years implementing water conservation practices like sprinkler irrigation, cement ditches and leveling farm fields.

We all enjoy the “Miracle of Modern American Agriculture.” We enjoy the greatest variety, highest quality, safest and most affordable food available in the world today. American’s are paying less than ten percent of their disposable income on food. Less than two percent of our population produces the abundance we enjoy. Our food producing farm and ranch neighbors are families, not multi-national corporations. More than 80 percent of Utah agriculture is made up of family farms and ranches with annual sales of \$100,000 or less.

Farmers and ranchers generate nearly \$1.5 billion in gross sales with an economic contribution more than \$4 billion. With much of Utah agriculture located off the Wasatch Front in our rural communities, this economic contribution is significant. Agriculture linkages create more than 100,000 Utah jobs. Farm and ranch families contribute to their communities, send their children to public schools, employ their neighbors and pay taxes. Agriculture is the economic engine in many of our rural Utah counties.

Certainly, enjoying “Utah’s Own” agriculture products – fresh cherries, apples, tomatoes, and delicious cheese, turkey and beef - is the foundation.

Utah family farms and ranches also contribute to our quality of life. Along the Wasatch Front, interspersed agriculture provides open spaces that help cool the summer heat and stores carbon dioxide from our clogged highways and returns oxygen. Across the state, farmers and ranchers provide habitat for wildlife and recreational opportunities to escape from the crowds.

This spring as Utah family farmers and ranchers begin another production year, let us thank God for America’s food abundance and wish them well in their endeavors.

Randy Parker.

Randy Parker is the Chief Executive Officer for the Utah Farm Bureau Federation.

About the Utah Farm Bureau

The Utah Farm Bureau is the largest general farm and ranch organization in the state with more than 21,000 member families. Its mission is to improve the net income of the state’s farmers and ranchers and the overall quality of life in the state and nation through political action, educational and informational means. The Farm Bureau is a non-partisan, voluntary organization, and its efforts are based on grassroots policies developed by members at the local, county, state and national levels. It is affiliated with the American Farm Bureau Federation, the world’s largest general farm organization, with more than 6 million family members in 50 states and Puerto Rico. For more information, go to the Utah Farm Bureau Web site at <http://utfb.fb.org>.