

Is NJ Ag Illiterate?

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Today's NJ consumer is 3 generations removed from the farm. What does that mean?

They don't think they have any connection to agriculture. Growing up in Bergen County, I certainly didn't connect my lifestyle to Rural America. Being a commuter town for NYC, the lure of the city and its perks occupied my mainstream thought patterns; not hedgerows with foxes and their cubs or raising Valais sheep (look them up: Valais Blacknose sheep: <https://virginiavalaisblacknose.com>). So I have to say, they come by it honestly. So let's give them a break!

They don't mean to be offensive; City folk just don't know things about farm life. Yes, we get it that things are born and die but to face it each day like dairy farmers? Not so much. That open field? It means a place to run with a kite and has a different value set to suburban and urban folks. Yes, someone owns it and there should be no trespassing. But where they live it's already been turned into a county park. Maybe that's why they don't understand the difference between green acres, open space and farmland preservation.

Family pride may mean being the first person to go to college. Not being the 4th generation to run a business on the same land as those before them.

Responsibility could be working two jobs to put food, clothes and a bedroom set in an apartment. Not keeping livestock 24/7 365 and selling them to pay the fertilizer bill.

Faith to some means showing up to church, listening to an historical story from the bible and going to breakfast in the diner. For many farmers, it means planting seed in a field, waiting for mother nature to help (or hurt) it, watching the crops as they try their best to grow; all while knowing that harvest means more time, costs and patience to reap what was sown in the spring. Produced by some miracle called agriculture.

I believe it now falls on each and every one of us in the agricultural industry to help bridge the gap in knowledge. With school lessons (www.newjersey.agclassroom.org), community events like fairs (www.middlesexcountyfair.com) and opportunities to speak to the public and the media (<https://video.foxbusiness.com/v/6308263655112>) we can get the message across.

Yes, City folk are connected in ways they don't think of each day. We all eat food, use products from farming and share the natural resources. But we also share pride, responsibility and faith. It just means different things to each of us who live in New Jersey.