

2nd Annual ‘Ag in the Classroom’ Essay Contest Creation Of Holiday To Celebrate” Delaware Farmers’ Day”

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Since Delaware was settled in 1638 farming has played a major role in its economy and development. Throughout the colonial era, Delaware’s economy was primarily agricultural. In the 19th Century, Delaware was the leading producer of peach in the US and the world. Towns throughout southern Delaware came into existence as farmers planted huge orchards and the railroad extended south. The state seal leaves no doubt about the pivotal role of agriculture. Four of its seven contents, the wheat sheaf, corn, farmer, and ox symbolize agriculture.

United States Department of Agriculture names agriculture as Delaware’s largest industry. The value of farm sales was \$1.1 billion in 2008. Corn is the leading crop, followed by soybeans. Other crops include mushrooms, barley, wheat, melons, potatoes, green peas and lima beans. Apple is the leading fruit crop. Dairy products, greenhouse and nursery products are also top farm products. Meat chicken is Delaware’s most valuable farm product. Livestock and related products yield 70% of the state’s farm income. Milk is the state’s second largest livestock commodity. Delaware ranks second among all states for both average cash receipts and average income per farm according to the Delaware Department of Agriculture. The agricultural industry is also one of the largest employers in Delaware.

Given this immense contribution, it is fitting to create a “Delaware Farmers’ Day” holiday to:

1. Honor our hardworking farmers,
2. Remind Delawareans of agriculture’s vital role in Delaware,
3. Draw attention to the loss of farmland and how we can help reduce this trend.

The “Delaware Farmers’ Day” holiday should occur during summer when the widest variety of local produce will be available. The holiday should fall on July 8th annually. This date is significant because the Farmland Preservation Program Bill was signed on July 8, 1991 to conserve, protect and encourage improvement of agricultural lands in Delaware for the production of food and other agricultural products. Without efforts to preserve farmlands, there may be no farmers to celebrate in the future.

The celebrations should begin with a float showcasing farm equipment and Delaware farm produce followed by a gathering of farmers and the public. The Secretary of Agriculture or the governor would open the ceremony thanking farmers for their hard work and highlighting the immense economic and cultural contributions they make to their communities and the state. The importance of buying produce from local farmers to help make farming profitable so they can stay in business and reduce the potential of farmland loss to development should be stressed. Brochures containing farm and farmers market locations with website addresses for more information should be available to the public. Prizes and certificates should be awarded for environmentally friendly farm practices.

After the ceremony, the general public can purchase a wide variety of farm products, fresh or cooked, including sweet corn, potatoes, tomatoes, mushrooms, apples, green vegetables, sausages, milk, and best of all, as far as I am concerned, my favorite Delaware made farm-fresh creamy ice-cream. A sweet end to a memorable day indeed!