



Hats Off to Farmers!

What do you think of when you hear the word “farmer?” What picture comes to mind? Perhaps a man wearing overalls and a straw hat riding on a tractor or milking a cow?

This is a common misperception. Today’s farmers wear many hats. They are scientists, mathematicians, economists, supervisors, environmentalists, and accountants.

Farmers are true entrepreneurs who make many important business decisions. Did you ever imagine a farmer as one who sits at a computer making spreadsheets or who reads the Wall Street Journal?

A generation ago may have found a farmer consulting the phases of the moon or an almanac before planting, but today’s farmers use satellites, computers, sophisticated machinery, and a college degree to assist them.

Technology is increasingly becoming the farmer’s friend. Imagine a satellite analyzing the soil’s moisture or slope of the land so it is known what/where to plant to produce the most productive yield. Or how about a global positioning system on the tractor or a computer that automatically spreads fertilizer in the exact amounts needed. Farmers must continuously educate themselves to keep informed of new methods.

FARMERS — Scientists, Mathematicians, Economists, Supervisors, Environmentalists, Accountants and Students



One farmer who wears these many hats is **Bob Koch** (pronounced “Coke”) of Shelby County, Kentucky. Mr. Koch has a Bachelor’s Degree in Economics. As a farmer he uses tools such as the Wall Street Journal or his computer to check out the Chicago Board of Trade reports, make spreadsheets, and keep his records/books, and taxes. He continually attends classes to learn the newest farming methods, and uses his math skills to solve problems.



His advice to young farmers: “Good business skills are the most important for analyzing problems, developing and modifying plans. Concentrate on business skills because technology changes so quickly.”

Farming is a year-round occupation for Mr. Koch. In the winter, marketing plans are made as to what to grow, educational opportunities are taken advantage of, and meetings with grain specialists are a few ways he spends his time. The spring brings planting, contracts, and fertilizing. During the summer, Mr. Koch goes through his fields to see how the crop is growing. He will also look for insect and weed pests. If there are any problems, Mr. Koch will decide how he can help his crop and still make the most money. Being environmentally friendly is a must. “I have lots of money invested in my land and I don’t want to poison the future growth,” says Mr. Koch. And of course fall brings the harvest which is one of the busiest times on the farm.



Corn is Mr. Koch’s largest income crop, with half grown to feed his cattle, and half to sell.

Bob Koch is proud to be a Kentucky farmer!

Another proud Kentucky farmer is **Mike Ellis** of Worth & Dee Ellis Farms in Eminence, Kentucky. Although he makes his living farming, his concerns are the same as those of urban businessmen: too little time for family and friends, insurance and fair wages for his employees, and keeping the ledger in balance. Weather and pricing may be out of Mr. Ellis’s hands, but little else escapes his watchful eye on his family farm.

Some might say the more things change, the more they stay the same. For Mike Ellis, there are still crops to rotate, yields to calculate, grains to store and haul to buyers, and an ever-changing market to consider. What are the greatest challenges for Mr. Ellis today? – Balancing family and career. His day begins by 7:30 a.m. and often ends at 9:30 p.m. Farming activities consume most of the hours of the day and evening.

His advice for future farmers includes: “Start early, learn as much as you can, and work toward a degree in agricultural education. Like so may 21st century careers, math, science and technology play an important role in getting the job done well. Staying in school and studying are important steps toward becoming a successful farmer.”

When all is said and done, our high-tech farmers want people to appreciate where their food comes from, that the land and soil we depend on is precious and ours to protect, and that farming is still hard work, long hours, and filled with deep satisfaction.