

Column: College Community Connection

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Agribusiness Delivers Dinner

By Dr. Al Roberts

If you could choose anything at all, what would you want for dinner? I would take a bone-in ribeye steak, a baked potato with butter and sour cream, and a fresh Caesar salad. Dessert would feature apple pie with vanilla ice cream. But I'm flexible. I could also be quite content with Chesapeake Bay blue crabs or barbecued spare ribs or shrimp and sausage gumbo.

All of the items on my list of favorite foods are readily available to me because of agribusinesses, the collection of industries involved in providing agricultural products in desired forms for consumer purchase or consumption. Farming is at the heart of agribusiness, but many additional enterprises support our nation's farmers, ranchers, and harvesters. Agribusinesses include processors, manufacturers, distributors, packaging companies, advertisers, wholesalers, retailers, and many more. They provide seed, fertilizer, feed, fencing, equipment, and a host of services that range from veterinary care to financing, and they offer career opportunities in fields such as communication, construction, research, resource management, forestry, and the management of fisheries and wildlife stocks.

This wide spectrum of occupations is necessary because agribusiness is responsible for feeding (food), clothing (fiber), and sheltering (wood products) people around the globe. Agricultural products are our nation's top export category. In Virginia, agribusiness is our largest private industry. In fact, there are 44,000 farms in Virginia with an average size of 181 acres (totaling 8.1 million acres), and the Commonwealth ranks in the nation's top 15 producers of fresh market tomatoes, apples, grapes, peanuts, cotton, turkeys, and chickens for meat.

Products and services provided by agribusinesses are so ubiquitous people often take them for granted. To help raise awareness, the Agriculture Council of America annually promotes National Ag Week, which will be observed this year March 18–24 with the focus "Agriculture: Food for Life." Events tied to the observation will help tell the story of agriculture in America, recognize the role agriculture plays in our daily lives, and celebrate the abundance of safe products available in the American marketplace.

During National Ag Week, SVCC's Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Business and program chair for the College's agribusiness offerings, Dr. Dixie Dalton, and her colleagues will be visiting area elementary schools to interact with students and talk about the origins of their food. Dr. Dalton will also present a session titled "Agribusiness Is Everybody's Business: How Is It Yours?" at an Open House for High School Seniors at SVCC's Daniel Campus on March 23. She will discuss the wide range of agribusiness careers and education options available to students at SVCC and through transfer to senior institutions. For more information about SVCC's agribusiness degree and certificate offerings, contact Dr. Dalton dixie.dalton@southside.edu or call 434-949-1053.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at al.roberts@southside.edu.