1st Place, 7th – 9th Grade Essay
Our Community Counts on Farmers

By Olivia Gregory, 8th Grade
Pike Liberal Arts School, Pike County

Farmers in Alabama play a crucial role in the health, economy, and well-being of our communities. From the food we eat to the clothes we wear, much of what we rely on every day comes from farms. Farmers work hard to grow crops, raise animals, and manage the land, all of which are essential for life in Alabama. Our communities count on farmers in many different ways.

One of the most important ways we depend on farmers is for the food we eat. Alabama farmers grow a wide variety of crops, including peanuts, pecans, cotton, soybeans, com, and vegetables. These crops are used to make many of the foods we find in grocery stores, restaurants, and even school cafeterias. Without farmers, it would be much harder to get fresh, healthy food. Local farmers also help provide fresh produce at farmers markets, where people can buy fruits and vegetables that were grown just a few miles away. This access to local food is not only good for our health, but it also supports the local economy. According to Alabama's Farmers Market Authority website, when people buy from farmers markets, they help farmers earn a fair price for their hard work, instead of having to sell their crops to bug companies that might pay less.

In addition to crops, Alabama farmers raise livestock, such as chickens, cattle, and pigs. According to the USDA, more than half of all farms in the state raise cattle, but the top livestock product is poultry. Alabama is one of the largest producers of poultry in the United States, and chicken farming is a major industry in the state. Chicken, beef, and pork are essential sources of protein for many families, and farmers ensure that there is enough food to feed Alabama's population. These farms also provide jobs for many people, from those working directly on the farm to those processing and distributing the meat. Without farmers, the food supply chain would be disrupted, and many people would be out of work.

Farmers also play a key role in maintaining Alabama's environment and natural resources. Agriculture is not just about producing food it's also about taking care of the land. Farmers work to conserve soil, protect water resources, and manage forests and grasslands. Many farmers use sustainable farming practices to keep the land healthy for future generations. By doing this, they help prevent soil erosion, protect wildlife habitats, and ensure clean water supplies for communities across Alabama. In this way, farmers help keep Alabama's natural beauty and resources intact for everyone to enjoy.

The economy of Alabama also counts on farmers. Agriculture is one of the largest industries in the state, contributing billions of dollars to the economy each year. Farming not only provides jobs on the farms themselves, but also creates jobs in related industries like transportation, equipment manufacturing, and food processing. According to Alabama Farm Facts, a brochure provided by Alabama Farmers Federation, the state has more than 43,000 farms covering 8.9 million acres with the average size being 206 acres. Alabama's green industry contributes $2.9 billion annually to the state's economy and employs 43,000 Alabamians. When farmers do well, the entire state benefits, because money earned from farming circulates through the economy, supporting local businesses and services.

Community events like agricultural fairs and festivals celebrate farmers and the essential work they do, reminding everyone of the importance of farming to Alabama's way of life. In Alabama, events like the Alabama National Fair, the Sweet Home Alabama Farm Expo and the multiple Alabama 4-H events throughout the state, bring people together to learn about farming. Alabama is also represented annually in Moultrie, Georgia at the Sunbelt Ag Expo where 10,000 visitors have the opportunity to learn and connect through Sweet Grown Alabama, a non-profit foundation, that helps enhance marketing opportunities for local farmers in the state. Events such as these serve as an opportunity to educate the public about the importance of farming and also encourages people to support local farmers. These types of events can help farmers grow their businesses and build stronger connections within the community.

Lastly, communities in Alabama count on farmers for their connection to tradition and culture. Farming has been a way of life in Alabama for generations, and many families have passed down their farms through the years. The Census of Agriculture claims that Alabama farms are primarily owned by families or individuals with approximately 34,000 family farms as of 2022. These family farms are an important part of Alabama's history and culture, and they help keep traditions alive.

In conclusion, our communities in Alabama count on farmers in many ways. Farmers provide the food we eat, help protect the environment, support the economy, and keep cultural traditions alive. Without farmers, our daily lives would look very different. By appreciating and supporting farmers, we ensure that Alabama remains a strong and thriving state. ■