

Hello there, and welcome to As It Is -- VOA's daily show for people learning American English!

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today on our program, we hear about a group that works to reconnect people to the land and to honor local farmers.

"The food has been absolutely wonderful. I totally appreciate hard work, because now that you see everything they have to do to take care of the animals and make sure they're well cared for."

But first, we explore how the growing worldwide demand for food is changing the way the food we eat is being produced.

Global Meat Demand Spurs Transformation, Backlash

Demand for meat, milk and eggs is growing around the world. To meet that demand, the way these products are produced is changing. The change is from small farms to large, industrial operations. This has already happened in the United States. But not everyone is happy with the change. As a result, there is also a growing demand for products grown locally on small farms.

Karen Leggett reports...

In Clinton, North Carolina, some old buildings are all that remain from the days when James Lamb raised hogs next to his home. He saw that small farmers were having trouble competing with companies that own large farms.

“They had better consistency, better pork quality, better genetics. So after college, in ‘98, I decided to try to modernize.”

He stopped raising hogs in small buildings and built two industrial-sized hog barns. Each of them holds 1,500 hogs.

Nearly all pigs are raised this way in the United States now. The government says the efficiency of large-scale production in a controlled environment has helped reduce the price of a pork chop by nearly 20 percent since 1998.

These efficient and intensive production methods are being used around the world. Many experts say that is a good thing as the demand for meat grows. But livestock expert Carolyn Opio points out that the land, water and feed required to produce it are limited.

“If we are to produce within the constraints that we are facing today, efficiency, I think, is very, is key.”

Ms. Opio is with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

But the results of efficiency are not always necessarily good. The waste from thousands of confined animals can pollute waterways and produce greenhouse gases. And some health experts are concerned about the antibiotics and other chemicals being put in the animals' feed. Others criticize the conditions in which the animals are kept.

So today, a growing number of people are like Kevin Summers in Amissville, Virginia, and returning to small-scale farming.

"In order to feed the world, I think this is a better way. It's a, you know, it's a cleaner way. It's a more humane way."

More Americans today say they want to know where their food comes from. Some might like the way Kevin Summers raises his hogs.

"I can see the entire process unfold before my eyes and know that they had a good life and were healthy and happy."

The hogs eat damaged apples and old pumpkins. This reduces food waste. But this kind of farming also means higher prices. Even so, Kevin Summers says he believes it would still be possible to meet global demand this way.

"And it would just involve people making the choice to buy this kind of food and say that, 'I care about something other than just the cost.'"

Serving Farm-Fresh Meals -- At the Farm

"Farm-to-table" is the name of a movement that encourages people to eat locally grown food. The farm-to-table idea has become more popular in recent years. But there is also a group that brings "table to farm." This traveling group is called Outstanding in the Field. It says its mission is to reconnect people to the land and to honor local farmers by creating a sort of restaurant without walls.

Karen Leggett has more on the group, and its founder, Jim Denevan.

"Just even those out with the new table."

Jim Denevan got the idea for this kind of "culinary adventure," as he calls it, ten years ago. He recently prepared tables for more than a hundred people at Briars Farmstead in Virginia. He and his eight-member crew arrived the night before. Chefs from a local restaurant prepared the dinner.

"The mission of Outstanding in the Field is to bring people closer to where food comes from and hear the stories directly from the farmer, walk around and get to know places like this, which are important, I think."

Jim Denevan's brother is a farmer and he himself is a former chef. He thought the idea of a meal served right at the farm made sense, though not everyone agreed.

“But I wanted to make the idea work, so I decided to cross the country -- I went all the way across the United States and set the table in farms and ranches and on beaches, and all the places where food comes from.”

Guests bring their own plates to the meal. When they arrive, the farmer shows them around.

“These are free-range chickens. We want them to eat as much pasture as possible because that’s the magic.”

Matt Szechenyi and his family operate Briars Farmstead.

“This type of event connects us with a lot of enthusiastic people, people that will -- we can form relationships with in the future. And this type of small farm business thrives on relationships.”

The tour of the farm ends at the dinner table. The meats in this five-course meal come from Matt Szechenyi’s farm. The vegetables and other ingredients come from nearby farms. Guests and local farmers sit together.

Annoica Ingram came with a friend.

“The food has been absolutely wonderful. I totally appreciate hard work, because now that you see everything they have to do to take care of the animals and make sure they're well-cared-for.”



We hope you enjoyed the program.

It was written from reports by Steve Baragona and June Soh.

I'm Christopher Cruise, and that's As It Is for this Monday, September 16th from The Voice of America.



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