



NEBRASKA FARMER

The Gift of Work Ethic for Farm Kids

Kids are busy these days. It may sound crazy, but I hope we still make time to give them the gift of hard farm work.

Curt Arens | Dec 09, 2014

As the father of teenaged farm kids, I understand how busy those kids are these days. For my wife and I as parents of a high schooler for the first time, the busy schedule comes as a bit of a shock. My daughter, who is a high school freshman, is involved in volleyball, basketball and will be running track this spring. She is in chorus, band and FFA. At church, she sings in choir and is taking Confirmation classes. Most folks might say that she is too involved, and there are days when I

think so too. As she grows into her high school career, she'll have to figure out the activities she wants to focus on most of all.



But that is life today. As adults, even as farming adults, we are extremely busy too. Because of the amount of community, school and church activities and our necessary involvement in those things is part of the modern fabric of rural life. We wear a lot of hats outside of our farming or ranching operations, and isolation on the farm is pretty difficult to accomplish. So, in many ways, the busy schedule of teenagers these days is preparing them for busy lives as adults that they most likely cannot avoid, no matter where they live and work.

When I was a teenager, we rode the bus to school and came home after school and did chores. For me, that meant feeding chickens, gathering and washing hundreds of eggs, milking one cow by hand and pitching manure from farrowing crates in the sow barn.

I was involved in FFA and 4-H, and went out for football. But outside of these activities and church activities, we really didn't travel into town that often, and we lived only four miles from Crofton on a good, asphalt road. So, as you all know, times have certainly changed.

Putting this into perspective, I am reminded that when I was growing up, I really didn't enjoy the chores. I thought the "town kids" had more opportunities and I wished I could enjoy some of those more often. But when I didn't have football practice or games after school, farm tasks were part of my routine. I was part of the farm team, and I knew that my contributions, especially as I grew older, were important to my parents.

The odd thing was that when I went away to college, I MISSED the morning and evening chores. OK, I'm fibbing a bit. I really didn't miss the chickens. But I did miss working with the hogs and cattle. I didn't realize the experiences I was learning and enjoying every day working with livestock and just being out and about on the farm. It took some separation for me to appreciate those things.

I hope that my children, as busy as they are in non-farm activities, are not missing out on the great gift we as parents can give them. Work. That is teaching them the value and rewards of hard farm work and responsibilities, not to mention the fun stuff about living on a farm.

My daughters have responsibilities of helping with their younger brothers, playing trucks and tractors with them. Lauren is our family painter, so she gets the jobs of painting around the farm during the summer. Taylor is our animal husbandry specialist, so she gets involved with the livestock and domesticated critters we have around our place. My boys help Dad whenever they can, in the garden, in the woods, with the cattle or fixing fence. We are very concerned about farm safety for our children, so we take time to train them in their tasks and make sure that they

are supervised. So, farm safety should always be at the forefront, but hopefully it isn't a deterrent to the giving the kids a taste of good, old-fashioned sweaty work once in a while.

We don't over work them or give them responsibilities they can't handle, but they need to be able to say to themselves someday that they grew up on a farm and learned values and basic skills. That's a great gift that we, as farming parents, can give to our children. I worry sometimes that we aren't giving that gift often enough in our busy lives.