

# Agricultural Background Information

Agriculture plays a major part in our lives: from what we wear, to what we use in our classes and even to what we do after school. We may not always think of agricultural products as the physical source of the items or things we use every day. However, most of these daily essentials can be traced back to an agricultural source.

Production agriculture, or farming, is what most students think of when they hear the word agriculture. This is the actual production or growing of raw commodities. People who raise and harvest crops and livestock for consumption or purchase are typically categorized as farmers and ranchers. It doesn't stop there. Production agriculture also includes a variety of specialties, such as fish, timber, fur-bearing animals, trees, shrubs, flowers, herbs and much more.

Most of the products we use every day come from agriculture. The sheets we sleep on and the pajamas we wear are made from cotton. The feathers in the pillows may come from chickens or ducks. The cereal and milk we eat for breakfast; the pencils crayons, and paper that we use at school; and the baseballs, bats and gloves we use after school all originate from raw agricultural products. We know that our food comes from agriculture, but you can see how we are surrounded by and reliant upon many agricultural products the whole day through.

Counting is also a very important part of all of our lives. The people who grow our food have to count very closely and keep very good records. They have to know how many acres to plant. They need to know how much seed and fertilizer they will need. In addition, they need to know how many bushels of wheat or soybeans or peanuts their fields produced during the year. They keep careful records so they can make sure they are earning enough money to pay their expenses.

Farmers who raise animals need to know how many offspring their animals produce so they will know how much feed to buy and how many they can sell. They need to know how much money they can expect to make, so they can plan for the coming year. Counting is a very important part of the farmer's job. Our government needs to keep a good count of crops and farm animals so they will know what kind of help the farmers need to make sure we have enough food to eat. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service is the government agency responsible for keeping count.