

"Throughout Southern Missouri, college students are preparing to pack their bags to head back to school. They'll take on a variety of topics in their post-secondary educations, but many of them will choose a course of study that emphasizes agriculture.

Agriculture is a popular field for our students, and the variety of concentrations within this academic area means they have plenty of options for specialization: agricultural economics, animal science, forestry, biochemistry, other sciences, and nutrition are just a few.

Embarking on this academic course is not necessarily a path back to the family farm. American agricultural researchers are at work around the globe, solving problems ranging from alleviating hunger to stopping the spread of deadly diseases. Though their curricula and their careers, these Missourians advance into a wide variety of jobs in industries and vocations throughout our economy.

So why do students from our region choose an academic plan focused on agriculture?

Well, we are surrounded by agriculture, plain and simple. Farms and ranches and forest products are core elements that feed into every sector of our rural economy. But there is also a unique understanding of our food supply that few outside the production agriculture areas of our country comprehend. We see firsthand how crops and animals are grown with care and become the basis for the safest, most affordable national food supply in the world.

In many cases, this process begins long before a seed goes into the ground or a new calf enters the world. It starts with scientific research, economics, and the complexities of nature. It ends in an efficient system stocking nutritious, fresh foods on grocery store shelves from coast to coast.

Agriculture has undergone unbelievable advancements in the last half century - it is very exciting to think about what the next 50 years will bring. Southern Missouri's farmers and ranchers have adapted to these changes in order to take advantage of new opportunities in the global agricultural marketplace. So as our young producers equip themselves with the expertise it will take to lead the industry in our dynamic economy, we have even more reasons to be optimistic about the future of Missouri agriculture.

It won't be easy. None of this would be possible without the rich history and strong traditions of innovation and hard work that characterize Southern Missouri's agricultural sector.

I'll be meeting with the men and women working in that tradition, at a wide variety of agricultural operations, in the coming weeks. For nearly 30 years, first Bill Emerson and now I have taken time during the summer to visit Missouri agricultural operations across the Eighth Congressional District. I'm very proud of our annual Missouri Farm Tour; it has, in its own right, become a tradition of keeping local, state and federal policymakers in touch with the agricultural foundation of our rural economy.

This year, I'll meet with Missouri producers at a fish farm, a creamery, horse and cattle operations, a mushroom farm, a feed blender, a timber company and row crop farms growing corn and soybeans.

And at many of these stops, I'll also see college students wrapping up a summer at home before heading back to school. They're combining classroom experience with real-world experience. No matter what course of study they pursue, their time spent in Missouri agriculture will be a credit to their careers and their character. One way or another, however, I bet many of them join the tradition of bringing innovation and opportunity to the farms and ranches of Missouri agriculture."

The annual Emerson Eighth District Farm Tour runs from Sept. 1st to 8th this year.