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We are approaching a very special time of year for me.... The Thanksgiving Season. It's a great time of the year to reflect on and to appreciate all that we have to be thankful for. Each of us should be thankful for families and friends that we count on for support and to share experiences with. We should also be proud that we live in a country that is so full of natural beauty and natural resources and that we have all the freedoms that many of us take for granted. Be thankful that we are a part of a rich and culturally diverse group of people that we call Americans. It is also a time to reflect and to remember all those who have served and given their lives in our armed forces so that we can have all these things to be thankful for in such abundance.

Each year beginning on the Friday before Thanksgiving leading up to Thanksgiving day is National Farm City Week. Farm City week had a very humble beginning on a train leaving from Chicago bound for Washington D.C. in 1955. Charles Bennett and Merle Tucker, Chairman of the Kiwanis International Agriculture and Conservation Committee, visited about the poor image of American agriculture, the strong urban influence on agricultural policies, the growing population (do you think they imagined that only fifty years later we would have passed the 300 million level), and the increasing numbers of our nation's population with no direct ties to the farm. Farm City Week is now celebrated in all fifty states and in communities both rural and urban all across the nation.

Today less than two percent (one person in fifty) of Americans actually live on farms; however, each and every one of us are fortunate enough to be able to participate in my three favorite activities.... Breakfast, lunch, and supper! I also try to have a couple snacks along the way just to break the monotony.

Thanks to the hard work of local farmers and the benefit of better production technology, the American people spend only a little over ten

percent of our disposable income on food. This is compared to approximately fifteen percent in England, eighteen percent in Japan, twenty-five percent in Mexico, and an unbelievable fifty-one percent in India! It takes the average American only 40 days to pay for our food for a year (a just for your information fact, it takes us 131 days to earn enough to pay our taxes). We are very fortunate to have the safest, most affordable food and fiber in the world.

Agriculture is a big industry in Alabama and here in Walker County as well. In fact, agriculture is the single largest industry in Alabama. Here are some interesting facts on Alabama Agriculture from the Alabama Farmers Federation. There are approximately 48,000 people in Alabama who call themselves farmers. For generations those few families have dedicated their lives to creating a \$4.7 billion business for our state — Alabama's largest.

But today, agriculture reaches far beyond the farm gate. Alabama's agribusiness industries account for 476,000 jobs with annual earnings of more than \$9 billion. That's 21 percent of the state's workforce. In fact, 85 percent of all jobs created by agriculture are not on the farm at all. They include farm equipment dealers, seed and feed suppliers, food processors, exporters and retailers. Together, these industries account for more than \$43 billion or 22 percent of the state's direct output—more than any other industry.

The focus for this year's local Farm City Celebration is beekeeping. While frequently misunderstood and often overlooked in their importance to agriculture, it is the honeybee and the patient and very knowledgeable beekeepers who tend them that are responsible for much of crop pollination that gives us the bountiful food supply (not to mention the honey) that we enjoy each and every day. We are fortunate to have a very strong and active beekeeper association that meets at the Extension Office each forth Monday at 6:30 p.m. I would encourage anyone who is interested in beekeeping or just simply interested in bees to join the local beekeeper association and attend their meetings.

I wanted to give my special thanks and appreciation to Ms. Sara Jones and the Women's Committee of our local Walker County Farmers Federation for heading up our 2006 Farm City Celebration. Sara and her women's committee and the local Kiwanis Club serve as local sponsoring partners for our Farm City Activities. It is through partnerships such as this and the realization that through the cooperative efforts and understanding of our rural farming communities and our urban city communities that our nation will remain the strong beacon of freedom that so many have worked

so hard and given so much to become. That is what the Farm City Week celebration is all about. Thanks again to Sara and the Walker County Farmers Federation Women's Committee and to the Kiwanis Club for all of your hard work.