Finding Reasons to Be Thankful After a Challenging Harvest

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As harvest season winds down across southeast Kansas, many producers are probably ready to put a few long days behind them and catch their breath. This year's harvest has brought its share of stress, frustration, and challenges. Between weather conditions, equipment breakdowns, crop conditions, markets, and the long hours spent trying to get everything done, it can be easy to feel like harvest has taken more out of us than it should.

Agriculture has a way of demanding our attention. When harvest begins, everything else seems to take a backseat. Days get longer, meals get shorter, and plans are often dictated by the weather rather than the calendar. We spend our time watching forecasts, checking fields, keeping machinery running, and trying to make the best decisions we can with the circumstances in front of us. Sometimes, despite all the planning and hard work, things simply don't go the way we hoped.

As we approach Thanksgiving and the holiday season, I think it is worth taking a step back and reminding ourselves that even during a difficult year, there is still plenty to be thankful for.

It is easy to measure a year in agriculture by bushels per acre, cattle prices, input costs, or how smoothly harvest went. Those numbers certainly matter, and for many families, they have a direct impact on the farm's future. But they don't tell the whole story. Sometimes we get so focused on what went wrong, what we lost, or what we still need to accomplish that we overlook the things that are going right.

We should be thankful for the opportunity to do what we do. Farming and ranching are not easy, and each year comes with its own set of uncertainties. Yet, we continue to plant, care for livestock, manage pastures, work the ground, and prepare for another season. There is something to be said about the determination of those who keep showing up, even when the year has tested their patience. Agriculture requires a level of resilience that is often taken for granted.

We should also be thankful for the people who surround us. In rural communities, it is not uncommon to see neighbors helping neighbors, whether that means lending a hand with equipment, helping haul grain, bringing a meal to the field, or checking in after a long day. Those small acts of kindness are reminders that we are not meant to handle every challenge on our own. The strength of agriculture has always been found in its people, and the support of family, friends, neighbors, and our communities is something we should never overlook.

For me, this time of year is also a reminder of how quickly life moves. Work can easily consume our days, especially during busy seasons. We often tell ourselves we will slow down when harvest is over, when the weather changes, when the next project is finished, or when things finally settle down. But there is always another job waiting. The holidays provide a good reminder to make time for the things that matter most, whether that is sitting around the table with family, watching the kids enjoy the season, visiting friends, or simply enjoying a quiet evening at home.

Being thankful does not mean ignoring the struggles of the past year. Some producers are facing difficult financial decisions, disappointing yields, damaged crops, or uncertainty about what the next year will bring. Those challenges are real, and they deserve to be acknowledged. But gratitude and hardship can exist at the same time. We can be frustrated with how the year turned out and still appreciate the people, opportunities, and blessings that remain in our lives.

As an Extension agent, I have the opportunity to visit with producers, landowners, and families throughout our communities. One thing that continues to stand out is the willingness of people to keep learning, adapting, and

moving forward. Agriculture has never been without challenges, and it likely never will be. But the willingness to face those challenges, help one another, and find ways to improve is what keeps our rural communities strong.

As we head into Thanksgiving, I encourage everyone to take a little time to look beyond the stress of harvest and reflect on what they are thankful for. It may not have been the year we hoped for in the field, but there is more to life than the outcome of a crop. The people around us, the families we come home to, the communities we live in, and the opportunity to wake up each day and keep moving forward are blessings worth recognizing.

Harvest will eventually be finished, equipment will be put away, and plans for next year will begin. There will always be another field to work, another problem to solve, and another season to prepare for. But for a few days this holiday season, I hope we can all slow down, enjoy the moment, and remember that even in a stressful year, there is still plenty to be thankful for.

From my family to yours, I hope you have a safe, happy, and blessed Thanksgiving and holiday season.

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