

Agriculture is 24/7/365, All Year Long
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NYFB State Promotion & Education Committee Chair

As the snow falls and our friends head to the ski lift or to the southern states, many may wonder what farmers do in the winter. There is probably time to have a few hours, or even days, away from the farm, but there is always something to do. Farm kids are familiar with the mantra: chores first, then Christmas gifts, the movies, or fun times – unless the barn cleaner breaks or the winter storm blows in, then the plan changes.

As vegetable farmers and bedding plant growers, we just finished ordering our seeds, stakes, and started plants for the spring 2017 growing season. It was a several day process of perusing those colorful seed catalogs that have been arriving for weeks. The greenhouse lies idle now but will come alive in March when we start the process all over again.

For friends in Nebraska, it was keeping the cattle warm in howling winter winds, repairing the ripped curtain on the livestock shelter, and securing the calf hutches. Friends in North Dakota had a half inch or more of ice on everything and were without power for several days. The cattle still needed feed and water and thankfully they obtained a generator to run the essential equipment and keep the house somewhat warm.

Dairy farmers know that the cows need milking and feeding every day – in fact twice or three times a day! The driveway must be plowed to get the milk truck in, the water kept from freezing, and the barn scraped. For my great-niece, this winter was the joy of her first heifer producing a newborn heifer calf, and anticipating showing one or both at the county fair.

Livestock farmers anxiously watch the lambs and pigs for signs of new babies. Newborns require constant monitoring, sometimes special attention to keep them warm and eating properly. Grape growers, beekeepers, fruit farmers, fish farmers all have their special winter duties. 4-H kids plan their projects for the next year, figuring out which animals will be the right age for the various classes at the county fair.

Maple producers are working in the woods, trimming trees, laying out lines of tubing, and reading equipment for tapping the trees and boiling the maple syrup. Lots of planning also goes in to the annual March Maple Weekends when the “sugar houses” will be open to the public to view the process of making syrup, sugar, maple spread, and other goodies.

Winter is also the time for meetings- educational seminars on growing, planting, pest control, and other topics. Farm Bureau members take time to consider priorities for legislative action and schedule a trip to the county or state legislature to talk to their representatives. Promotion and Education committee members plan spring dairy tours, the fair booth display, and farmer-neighbor dinners.

Our agricultural scientists and researchers, Cooperative Extension Educators, the manufacturers of agricultural equipment, and the agricultural equipment dealers all keep busy in the winter preparing for the busy spring, summer, and fall months of planting and harvesting.

Yes, agriculture is a year-round business dedicated to keeping our consumers fed, clothed, sheltered, and even entertained. We're happy to do it; it is a way of life as well as a living.