Agriculture is a part of Iowa’s history. Tribes in Iowa cultivated goosefoot before corn was important. The Meskwaki people used farming techniques to tap maple trees and raise corn, squash, and lima beans. European settlers that built homes in Iowa also used the rich soil to grow crops and raise animals. The people of Iowa have relied on the state’s geography, climate, and soil to grow food.

As more people moved to Iowa, more food was needed. People began developing new tools and techniques. They sold or traded what they grew. People shared resources and cities formed. Roads and railways were created to transport goods. Jobs were created because of agriculture.

Today, food, fiber and fuel are traded globally. Agriculture businesses help to make, repair, and sell agriculture products. Products often travel thousands of miles to where they are consumed. People around the world earn a living by raising and selling plants and animals.

Geography is the study of places and the relationship between people and their environments. Where people live affects what can grow. What grows affects food and clothing. As a result, people in Asia eat a lot of rice. People in Europe eat more bread and pasta. People living near the ocean eat a lot of fish. People inland eat more beef or pork. Food, clothing and how people live is part of their culture. Culture is influenced by agriCULTURE!

Try this — Draw a model of a farm. How does what you grow affect you, your family, and your community?
After an economic boom in the mid-1970s, farmers purchased more land and equipment. The drought in 1983 caused fewer crops to be harvested. This and a weak U.S. dollar caused farmers to be in financial crisis.

Think & Discuss
How do you think these events have influenced agriculture today?

A History of Agriculture in Iowa

Native Americans Settled Iowa
For thousands of years, Native American Nations have lived in, or claimed rights to what is today, Iowa. Throughout history the Ioway, Sauk, Meskwaki, Sioux, Potawatomi, Oto, and Missouri tribes have resided in Iowa. Today more than 10,000 people with indigenous heritage live in Iowa.

1833
First official European settlement was established in Iowa through the Black Hawk Purchase.

1846
Iowa became a state

1,857
The Meskwaki purchased 80 acres of land for their settlement in Tama County

1891
George Washington Carver attends Iowa State

1892
John Froelich invented the gasoline tractor. His Iowa-built tractor showed that the future of farm power would be with mechanical power.

1930s
Great Depression and Dust Bowl led to farming practices that conserve soil.

1973
First Genetically Engineered Organism
This process is what was later used to create genetically engineered corn, soybeans, cotton, and other crops.

1978
Iowa experiments with ethanol-blended fuel heralding the future biofuel industry in the state and nation.

1983
Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act
Standards for U.S. migrant workers’ wages, housing, and transportation were implemented.

1983-1990
Farm Crisis
After an economic boom in the mid-1970s, farmers purchased more land and equipment. The drought in 1983 caused fewer crops to be harvested. This and a weak U.S. dollar caused farmers to be in financial crisis.

1990s
Precision agriculture and GPS introduced into agriculture

2022
The John Deere Company revealed their fully autonomous tractor

Carver researched soil that was “worn out” in the American South and identified crops that increase soil productivity.
We can get almonds, peaches, and bananas any time of year by going to the grocery store. But where do these foods come from? Explore the map to find out.

**THINK & DISCUSS**
How do natural resources and climate in an area affect what people choose to grow?
Have you ever had a piece of cake? How about scrambled eggs? When we buy food, we consider nutrition and price.

If you shop at a store or farmers market with family or friends, you may notice the price of food. Each time you go the price of food might be different. How can a dozen eggs be $1.80 one month and $2.95 the next? Prices tend to change based on supply of the product and consumer demand.

Each year during the spring and fall wild birds migrate. When animals move from one place to another, they can spread illness. The bird flu, or avian influenza, is a virus chicken and turkey farmers worry about. There is no cure for avian influenza. A flock that gets sick must be terminated. When many flocks become ill, the supply of chicken, eggs, and turkey decrease. The supply of agriculture products can affect the price we pay for those products at the store.

**Have you ever had a piece of cake? How about scrambled eggs? When we buy food, we consider nutrition and price.**

**Every day, people make decisions about money.** Business owners and families must weigh the pros and cons of their decisions. Though there may not be one “right” answer, people need to make informed decisions to help their business or family. Explore these scenarios to learn about financial decisions and how people make them!

**A Farmer’s Decisions**

Kim is a beef cattle farmer. She raises cattle until they are ready for market. Right now, she only has a few steers. Kim knows that expanding her business could be helpful for her and her community. If she raises more cattle, she can provide more food to people.

The problem is cattle can cost a lot. To help make her decision Kim starts with a pro-con list and takes it to a loan manager.

**Family and Farm Finances**

Dwayne is a parent. His family’s food budget and nutrition is very important to him. He knows that protein is part of a balanced diet. But buying meat by individual cuts can be costly. He’s wondering if he should buy a half beef from a local farmer and a full-size freezer. Would that be cheaper in the long run? He would like to support local farmers.

The problem is a new freezer can be an investment. Dwayne decides to review his credit card balance and talks with a financial advisor.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

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**Career Corner:** Ashley Sherod is a Farm Loan Manager for USDA in southeast Iowa. Farming can cost a lot of money. Farmers often get loans to purchase land, livestock, or equipment. Ashley can help them do that! She works with people who want to start farms to get them the funding they need. She says that communication and math skills are important in what she does!
FIVE IOWANS WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

NORMAN BORLAUG

Norman Borlaug was an Iowa native and a plant pathologist. His work in plant breeding is said to have saved over one billion lives. He is one of only seven people to have received the Nobel Peace Prize, the Congressional Gold Medal, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

JESSIE FIELD SHAMBAUGH

Jessie Field Shambaugh was from Shenandoah, Iowa. She was a teacher. She thought it was important that her students learn real skills to develop their head, heart, hands, and health. That’s right, the Mother of 4-H started the very first 4-H clubs here in Iowa!

THE WALLACE FAMILY

Henry C. and Henry A. Wallace were important in American agriculture. The father and son served as United States Secretaries of Agriculture. They created the Wallaces Farmer magazine that still runs today. Henry A. was interested in plants and founded the Hi-Bred Corn Company, which became Pioneer, and now Corteva Agriscience. He went on to become Vice President of the United States.

SISTER IRENE MUÑOZ

Sister Irene found her calling helping farm workers. Sister Irene advocated for migrant workers’ rights. She served on Governor Robert Ray’s Spanish Speaking Task Force in the 1960s. She helped provide housing standards for migrant workers.

To learn more or access an electronic version of this publication, visit us at www.iowaagliteracy.org.

Or contact us at Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation, 5400 University Ave., West Des Moines, 50266.