



Clif Slade discusses cool season crop production to a group of farmers.

Local Agriculture and the Community

Who do you get when you combine a diversified operation, a person who assists friends and neighbors in the success of their operations and a Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Committee member? The first name that comes to mind is Clif Slade of Slade Farms in Surry Virginia. The operation consists of locally grown commercial vegetables, chickens, eggs, hogs for farm prepared sausage, and recreational endeavors.

When you go down the rural roads of Surry County you might ask for directions to Clif Slade's place and the person you see will know who you are talking about. Chances are Mr. Slade has touched their life in some way as an integral part of the community. As his father used to say, "The farm gate hangs on welcome hinges." The value to know that you know who grew your food is something a lot of people are

looking for. Farmers want to know who their customers are too. Helping the community grow with the local food movement and making it sustainable is a huge contribution to society.

The local food movement is an example of the increased awareness of the importance of community. Giving to community and being part of that community is important to so many of us. Whether it is goods or services, food, fiber, or entertainment more and more people are recognizing the importance of obtaining these goods from local sources. The resurgence of earlier values is evident across the country and Virginia is no exception.

Strong communities learn together. He makes it a point to help educate about his success and failures and that of others so that the path to success is easier to find. He welcomes people to his place. Community is sharing. A lot can be learned from his values. If there is extra crop in the field the Slades work with local gleaning organizations so good food does not go to waste. He helps neighbors get their crops in the ground, helps a friend who is going to diversify their operation with a new crop, and provides and obtains from the community to face the challenges of the business. He encourages and practices cooperating with other growers to maximize each other's market by selling each other's product, providing food for community sponsored agriculture (CSA) products or trading different products for home consumption.

Community can be social. When it is time to process the hogs for sausage on the farm, friends and neighbors are around to lend a helping hand. "It is a social event where everyone works together, talks, shares stories and laughs together," says Slade.

Belonging to the FSA community through participation in FSA programs and services as a State Committee member is important. Committee members serve as a link between the agricultural committee and the Agency. The unique committee structure getting local farmers to assist in the administration of programs is a critical aspect of FSA farm program delivery. They help with the decisions necessary to administer the programs in their counties. They work to ensure FSA Agricultural programs serve the needs of local producers.

Getting to know the farmer who grows your food is an integral step in belonging to your local community. The partnership between FSA and local growers helps build the sustainability of rural America and support a safe, healthy, affordable food supply. To find out about FSA programs please visit www.fsa.usda.gov.