

Agriculture: A Lasting Impact
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I don't think I ever really thought about how much agriculture impacts our lives until my teacher asked us to write about it. This morning on my way to school, I was forced to notice one way agriculture affects us: we were running late because we got behind a cane truck on the road that was causing traffic to back up for miles. This made me look out the truck window and see the process going on in the sugarcane fields that lined Highway 311. It's funny that I've lived here all my life and never paid attention to this cutting and loading of sugarcane, and it happens a couple of times a year. Now that I had to think about it for a writing assignment, I realized that without agriculture, specifically sugarcane farming, people in Houma, Louisiana, would have a tough existence.

Louisiana's economy is based largely upon agriculture. The jobs connected to the production of crops are just as important as the actual crops. The impact on our lives is beyond belief. Here in Houma, Louisiana, where sugarcane farming is huge, I suddenly realized that without it, my life would be very different. Because sugarcane is such a major crop nation-wide and Houma is a major producer, the effect it has on our overall economy moves into different realms than farming. As a big contributor to our city's tax base, without it, we would have less effective schools and horrible roads and the average pay for other jobs (not related directly to agriculture) would be smaller. Because it generates big bucks for our parish, our schools, for instance, are able to have some of the best technology to help us succeed and move us toward careers in which we're interested, which probably don't have anything to do with farming. This is a unique concept: even though one doesn't want to make a living working in agriculture, it is agriculture that helps us pursue what we want to make a living doing.

I'll be getting my driver's license soon, so paying for fuel is going to be an issue. We recently had a speaker from the LSUAgCtr, an extension of Louisiana State University based in Houma, who told us about the progress being made in creating inexpensive fuel from sugarcane. They were actually fixing to have a presentation at one of the research center's farms on the outskirts of town that would show how viable this process was. I think I would much rather pay \$1.00 a gallon for sugarcane biofuel than almost \$4.00 a gallon for regular gasoline.

This research center, which is less than a mile from our school, has scientists and professors that are coming up with new types of sugarcane, cane with altered DNA that can withstand the natural elements and produce stronger plants for harvesting. This will save the farmers money and then the consumers will save money. All of this will change our future. It is already changing our futures. We're looking at the United States becoming a stronger agrarian country like when it was first established than just a predominantly industry-based country, which means Louisiana's economy will become stronger. We already lead the sugarcane industry with regards to the fabrication of machinery used for the production of sugarcane. Without the machinery, there is no harvesting. These advances are being utilized worldwide;

Africa, South America, Germany, and other sugarcane producing nations are looking to tractor companies in Louisiana to help them succeed.

The United States really depends on states that can produce successful crops. If we didn't have them, we would have to depend on other countries for these things. This would further dig us a bigger hole of debt. That would give us a bad reputation and show other countries that we are economically weak. I realize now that I live in a state that supports my country in a big way. Louisiana, and I would even say Houma, Louisiana, is helping the U.S. re-establish itself as an economic powerhouse. I don't think I'll ever take agriculture in my community for granted again.