



2024 Florida Farm to School Essay Contest

Winner: Second Place

Prompt: If I Were a Farmer

A Seed

A flat, tiny, pale seed is picked up by a gust of wind and floated across the Earth. It landed in soil too dry and too wet, on hillsides too shady and plains too sunny; only to be picked up again by the blustery wind and carried across the blue sky. As the gusts subsided, the seed gently floated down landing atop deeply rich brown soil. Gray took over the blue skies as the clouds opened up, letting rain pour down, burrowing the little seed into the fertile ground. As roots began to stick, the clouds parted and the seed was bathed in a golden glow, warming it from the inside out. As the minutes turned to hours and the hours turned to days, the seed grew. It grew strong stems and bushy green leaves that reached out laying claim over the space around them. Small yellow flowers appeared on the stems, poking their heads out and breathing in the fresh air. From the flowers came something round and plump, their scarlet red a beacon of edibility in a sea of greens and browns. Soil; water; light; space; and air. Those are the things a plant needs to survive. Those are the elements that create the beginning of a life.

As a farmer, this is the process that I nurture along. I farm tomatoes, a resilient plant that grows as vigorously as the sawgrass of the Glades. Florida is the perfect place for this warm weather crop. I can plant in late winter, allowing them plenty of time to grow before the summer heat soars. I start my seedlings off indoors in small pots and transplant them outside once they are strong enough to grow unbridled. Florida soil has a perfect pH just slightly acidic enough to provide the nutrients needed for the flowers to produce fruit. The plentiful spring and summer rains keep my tomatoes fresh and alive. These pristine conditions allow me to plant a wide variety of tomatoes: Everglades, Globe, Heirloom, Green Zebra, Cherokee Purple, and much more.

However, I didn't just choose to grow tomatoes because I knew they'd give me an abundant harvest. I chose tomatoes because they are vital to the economy of not only Florida, but the entire United States. Considering all 50 states, Florida is the second largest producer of tomatoes amounting to a profit of \$323 million in 2022. Out of the 300 different agricultural crops grown in Florida, tomatoes are the second largest and our state

accounts for 90% of the domestic fresh tomatoes in winter. During this winter season, Florida growers like me receive a premium market price on tomatoes. By growing one of the most widely consumed produce commodities, I am helping to ensure that supply keeps up with the demand of the American people.

A farm like mine isn't merely concerned with the quantity of crops needed to make a profit. As a farmer, I care about the quality of my produce. I care about the people in my community. I care about educating others on the importance of the agricultural sector to the lives of everyone.

My produce is shipped to local schools around me to be prepared and served at lunchtime. Most importantly, this guarantees that every student is eating a nutritious meal every single day. With my farm located in rural Collier County, over 45% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. This meal is vital to nourish their bodies in a way that allows them to thrive at school. This also gives students the opportunity to try new foods that arrive seed to school.

The key to success in life is education and knowledge, and that should start from a young age. My farm hosts many field trips for students of all ages, offering them the chance to learn about cultivation techniques, sustainability, disease control, machinery, and the ins and outs of the supply chain. This first-hand experience hopefully inspires young minds and creates interest that can be fostered through future careers in the agricultural industry.

A farm is a keystone part of any community. I attend local events and farmers markets where I sell my tomatoes directly to community members. This is mutually beneficial for both parties and is an important way to build enduring relationships. I also offer free classes designed to help people start their own home gardens and become partly self-sufficient in their food consumption.

The number of farms in the U.S is steadily declining as the biggest productions overtake families that have supported themselves for generations on the same plot of land. By nourishing and educating schools and communities, we can break ground and plant the seed of protecting domestic food production.