

Why FFA Week Is Closely Associated With Washington

Everyone knows that George Washington gave seven years of his life without pay to command the Revolutionary Army and eight more to serve as the new country's first president.

What isn't so well known is that he would have been much happier "under his own vine and fig tree" By his own admission, George Washington's first interest was farming.

It was because of his interest in farming and his accomplishments as a successful farmer that FFA WEEK, February 20-27 this year, is celebrated during the week of George Washington's birthday.

In addition, George Washington has been labeled the patron saint of the organization and has come to symbolize the FFA Treasurer.

Actually, it was a small inheritance that launched Washington's career as a farmer; he was 11 when his father died. According to custom, Lawrence — as the oldest son — got most of the estate including Mt Vernon. Washington's small inheritance was only a 280-acre Cherry Tree Farm plus a share of land at Deep Run.

Washington started accumulating land with money he earned as a surveyor. At 16, George had bought 550 acres, he added another 456 acres two years later and another 552 before he reached 21.

Lawrence died at the early age of 34, leaving Mt Vernon to his young daughter who died and Lawrence's will then made George the owner of Mt. Vernon's 2,500 acres!

Washington resigned his military commission when he was 26 and soon married Martha Curtis, a wealthy Virginia widow. At that time he owned about 5,000 acres of land which had not fared well under his brother's care during the campaigns.

Washington began to take farming seriously! He had a keen business mind, an eye for detail, and a searching curiosity about anything new. He kept a daily diary from 1760 till his death in 1799, much of it dealing with his farming activities. The only major interruption in his diary came during the American Revolution.

Washington divided his huge estate into five farms: Dogue Run Farm, River Farm, Muddy Hole Farm, Union Farm and the Mansion House Farm, where the big house still stands today.

The management system was quite modern. Each farm's overseer made weekly reports which Washington used for his notes, diaries, and account books. He made exacting notes on planting, harvest, and sale—a trait that is recognized in the FFA opening ceremony when the treasurer says, "I keep records of receipts and disbursements, just as Washington kept his farm accounts—carefully and accurately."

As early as 1766, Washington realized the error in continued tobacco cultivation. He practically abandoned tobacco, the major colonial crop.

Nothing was wasted at Mt. Vernon; Washington used everything that was usable and bought nothing he could produce—he tanned cattle hides and sold fish from his waters. Most historians credit Washington's farming success to an unusual ability for using by-products and conservation practices.

Some have called Mt. Vernon one of the earliest "experiment stations" in America. It's true that Washington tried various manure and water applications

under controlled conditions. He experimented with countless new seeds, fertilizers, and management practices.

Washington called the life of a farmer "most delectable." "It is honorable. It is amusing, and,

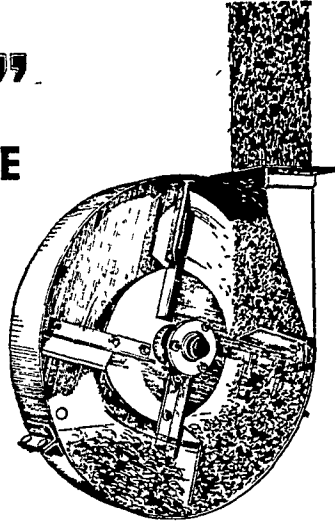
with judicious management, it is profitable," he said.

Perhaps his far-reaching vision and love of farm life are best expressed in his eighth address to Congress:

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with reference either to individual, or National Welfare, Agriculture is of primary importance. In proportion as nations advance in population, and other circumstances of maturity, this truth becomes more apparent; and renders the cultivation of the soil more and more, an object of public patronage."

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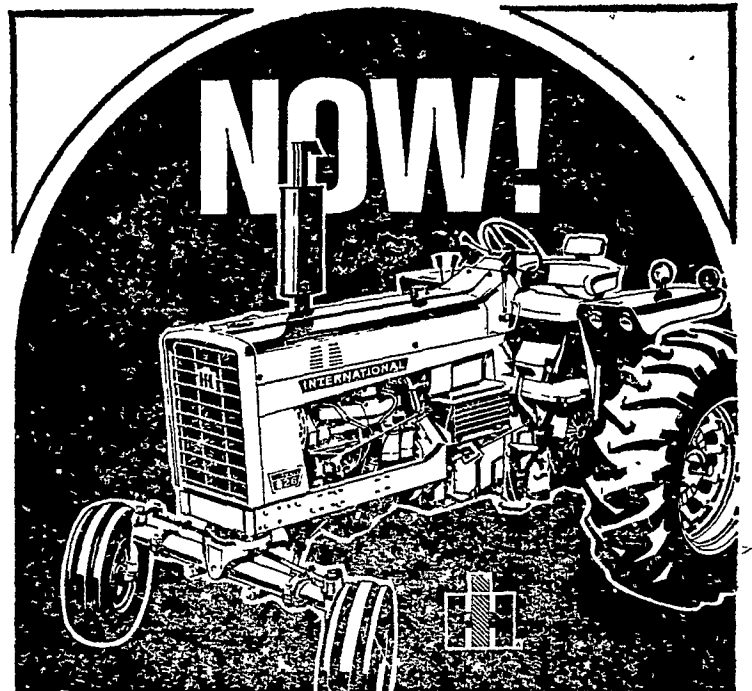


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