

A Big Blue Thank You!

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Nothing is better than sinking your teeth into a juicy Butterburger or scoop of Fresh Frozen Custard after a long day of work. The Culver's specialties practically say "Welcome to delicious" the second you take a bite. For fast food lovers such as myself, it makes me want to thank the franchise for producing such a wonderful product, however both Culver's and I can agree that it is not the restaurant we should be grateful for. This is the problem with today's agricultural education, there are too many misinformed consumers who are unable to connect the food on their plate to the hard-working men and women that helped get it there. Although, hope is not lost, through an initiative called the Thank You Farmers Project, Culver's is helping to correct this issue by promoting agricultural education by working and supporting local farmers, ranchers, and FFA chapters.

Culver's began in Sauk City, Wisconsin in 1986, feeding their small-town population locally sourced beef and vegetables with the hope that "every guest who chooses Culver's leaves happy." That mission statement lives on today through the over 650 restaurants across the United States and the thousands of employees that work there. Spreading fresh quality food with a smile and down-to-earth values, Culver's is quickly becoming a cherished household name. But what about the farmers that helped make all this happen?

In the words of Paul Pitas, Director of Public Relations and Communications for Culver's, "the meal doesn't start at the restaurant." Numerous local farmers, ranchers, specialists, transporters and representatives work diligently to produce and harvest the food served under the blue Culver's logo. Additionally, agricultural spokespersons and media specialists labor to better

public relations of agriculture through social media, videos, and websites. The Thank You Farmers Project is a way to thank these individuals for their effort every day.

For the farmers, Culver's works to simply raise awareness or get the public interested in their farming practices to better educate them. For example, the restaurant has helped excite the public through the 33 corn mazes that their developers have constructed to help get people out on the farm to actually see what goes on there through a loved fall tradition. Additionally, they have adopted the interesting practice of painting the barns of recognized agriculturalists blue as a visual "thank you" for their efforts and hopefully to get the public to do some research of their own into agriculture to figure out why they just drove by a blue barn on the highway. While these efforts are impactful, the most influential source of support Culver's has given is through the nearly \$2 million of donations they have given to support farmers and agricultural education.

Not only is the franchise working to help farmers now, but they are also supporting those of the future. By working with the FFA, which is the world's premiere youth leadership organization that helps develop interest in agriculture, they have inspired students and members to enter careers in agriculture to help educate and support the growing population. Through an aspect of the project called "Scoops of Thanks Day", Culver's has raised over \$200,000 for the FFA by simply asking customers to donate \$1 and receive a scoop of their delicious Fresh Frozen Custard. They have also created the FFA Essay Contest which "illuminates FFA members unique perspectives and gave last year's three winners \$15,000 to support their local chapter," according to Pitas. By utilizing social media in a campaign called #FarmingFridays, they have also invited FFA members to tell their stories and raise awareness about the possible career paths in agriculture.

With the Thank You Farmers Project, Culver's hopes that when you eat a Butterburger or have a scoop of their Fresh Frozen Custard you will remember the individuals who helped to get it there. I think Pitas says it best, "Culver's only wants to educate our guests about where our food comes from," and I think we can all agree that they are doing a great job at that. So next time you see your local farmer or rancher, make sure to give them a big blue thank you on behalf of Culver's.