

## **American Farm Land**

*By Karen Hallford, MS, RD, CSP*

Fresh fruits and veggies are not the only local items that we have right here in Georgia. Georgia agriculture, which includes food and fiber production, is a \$68 billion industry. We are the 5<sup>th</sup> largest producer of fresh produce, we raise more chickens than any other state, and we provide 45% of the nation's peanut crop. But the list keeps going. The state of Georgia also produces eggs, dairy, beef, soybeans, hay, turf grass, cotton and timber! Needless to say, agriculture in Georgia is a huge part of our economy. But Georgia is not the only state that makes a significant contribution to our food supply. Farms are located all over the US growing and producing food. In fact, America is the world leader in crop production.

Whether its fresh vegetables for a salad, protein packed eggs for breakfast or calcium rich milk to drink, it's important to remember that everything we consume comes from the land. Being good stewards of our land, like our farmers and ranchers across the US, helps to insure a safe and wholesome food supply for each and every community. So by eating locally, you not only support your local economy, but you are also supporting the American agricultural economy as a whole. And, you get some of the freshest most nutritious items out there.

And although most school systems are focusing on local fruits and veggies for their School Nutrition Programs, there are many other items that you can purchase locally for your family at home, like chicken, beef, dairy and eggs. Local farmers markets are a great place to connect with farmers and ranchers in your area and try new fresh local items. And the great thing about farmers markets is they will only be selling items that are in season; unlike the grocery store where it can be hard to know if what you are buying is at its peak of goodness. To help secure a strong agriculture economy for future generations, purchase and eat locally!