FROM THE **DIRECTOR**

During my childhood, most of the food that I ate was produced in my home county. Our diet consisted of lots of fruits and vegetables as well as milk, eggs and meat. The food was both delicious and nutritious. Then in the name of economic efficiency, the global food system became increasingly centralized. In much of the world, farmers no longer grow a variety of products for local consumption, but have become specialized in growing one or two items for the global market. The benefits of this centralized global food system include the fact that the American diet is relatively inexpensive and the variety of food available in the typical grocery store is astounding.

Unfortunately, however, there are numerous costs associated with our centralized food system. Perhaps most fundamental are the health implications. With Americans consuming more packaged food that is loaded with preservatives and fat, obesity levels and rates of diet-related illnesses such as Type II Diabetes have skyrocketed. Furthermore, there is little question that locally produced food is fresher and tastes better. Finally, as described in this issue, the global food system reduces local economic opportunities.

I am very excited about the articles in this issue of *Rural Connections*. Authors from throughout the country discuss innovative and tested approaches for improving our diet and the local economy at the same time. It is my hope that the ideas presented here can assist our readers in advancing the consumption of locally produced food in their own communities.

As always, I greatly appreciate the hard work and skills of our *Rural Connections* editor, Betsy Newman.

Best wishes,

Don E. Albrecht
Director, Western Rural Development Center
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PICTURED: SKARSGARD FARM IN NEW MEXICO.