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## **'Farm Life' Exhibition Takes Root in EIU's Booth Library**

*Feb-02-2007*

A national traveling exhibition, "Farm Life: A Century of Change for Farm Families and Their Neighbors," will take root at Eastern Illinois University's Booth Library this month.

Several events are planned throughout the exhibit's tenure at EIU, including an opening reception at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 7, in the library's Marvin Foyer.

The reception will include music by a local country string band (Jerry Ellis, mandolin; Phil Goodman, banjo; Mark Esarey, guitar; and Don Frederick, bass). The Illinois Center for Soy Foods will provide soy-based refreshments.

The reception will also include a presentation called "Farming in the 21st Century -- Cutting Edge Technology: Farmers are Savvy First Adapters" by Linda Kull, coordinator of soybean production research for the National Soybean Research Laboratory, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It will be held in the adjacent West Reading Room.

The exhibition, which is to be displayed in the Marvin Foyer and Atrium through March 9, will take a look at the profound changes experienced by farm families and their neighbors in the 20th century.

In 1900, 42 percent of the U.S. population worked in agriculture, but by 2000, that number dropped to less than 2 percent. Still, through generations of dramatic economic and social change, some families have maintained their connections to farming, their land and the rural communities in which they live and work.

Why do some families steadfastly hold on to this way of life while others choose to leave? What institutions can they rely on? What new strategies do they have to use to survive? The exhibit asks these and many other questions while offering visitors a view into life on a working farm.

"Farm Life" is divided into four sections: the farmhouse, fields, barn and gathering places in the larger community. In each section, photographs, objects and labels tell the story of life on a farm.

Through these items and other interactive pieces, audiences who view "Farm Life" learn about the social, economic and cultural framework of farms and their surrounding communities.

Universal themes of family and community are addressed, touching on issues that resonate with farming and non-farming viewers alike.

This exhibition has been made possible through NEH on the Road, a special initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Brought to Booth Library by Mid-America Arts Alliance, it was organized by The Chippewa Valley Museum, Eau Claire, Wis., and is based on a larger exhibition permanently installed in their galleries.

While the exhibition is at EIU, programs will be offered on a variety of topics related to farm life.

-- A free showing of "The Grapes of Wrath" is scheduled for 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 10, at the Will Rogers Theatre, 705 Monroe Ave., Charleston. The event is sponsored by Booth Library and the Coles County Arts Council.

The movie will be introduced by Chuck Koplinski, who reviews films for the Illinois Times in Springfield. Immediately following the show, participants will be able to discuss the many issues raised by the complex story.

The film is based on John Steinbeck's novel, which has been selected for this year's "One Book, One University" program, in which the entire campus community is encouraged to participate. Discussion roundtables are planned for March.

-- Debra Reid, associate professor of history at EIU, will present "What Do Steinbeck's Sharecroppers and Cornbelt Entrepreneurs Have in Common? Or, How the Farm Family Experience Defines Agriculture," at 4 p.m. Monday, Feb. 12, in the Conference Room 4440, Booth Library.

Reid's presentation is directed at the interest in celebrating farm-owning families' accomplishments as they relate to the old attitude most often associated with Thomas Jefferson's concept of agrarianism — by controlling property (the land), farm owners secured their independence. Farmers who did not own their land (tenants and slaves in Jefferson's time) functioned as little more than wage laborers, a dependent class incapable of protecting their interests.

-- "Migrant Children's Education During the Dust Bowl" will be presented at 4 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 13, in the Library Conference Room 4440, by Marie Fero, assistant professor of early childhood, elementary, and middle level education at EIU.

*For up-to-date information on these events, plus others on the EIU campus, please see <http://www.eiu.edu/~pubaff/calendar.php>.*

