

OLD VERSUS NEW

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We had a new faculty member that started here a few weeks ago. I found out that I started working here at UT before this person was even born. Needless to say, it made me feel old. I can remember party phone lines, black and white TVs, and the milkman delivering milk to our house twice a week. You know, those things back from the old days.

After thinking about those, I started thinking about all of the things that have changed in agriculture over the last 30 years. Technology has made things so different it is hard to fathom. Think about how much personal computers have enabled a producer to gain information. And not just personal computers – think about the smartphone you have. Any question can be answered in a matter of minutes with that device.

A few years ago, I got an email with a question about a topic I had never heard of. I searched on the computer, found a research article on the topic, and found the national expert. I found they worked at another university, so I searched the university website for their phone number, and then called. Within 30 minutes, I was able to reply to the original email with a very informed answer to their question. All due to technology.

However, it does not just stop with computers. Advances in planting machinery, methods, and herbicides have made agriculture much more sustainable than any time in the past. Agriculture has reduced soil erosion, waste, and improved productivity to the point that only two percent of the population needs to farm. The rest can have jobs working somewhere else.

The varieties of plant we used are better than they have ever been. From disease resistance, drought tolerance, and yield, plant breeders have used technology to provide options that farmers from 50 years ago could only dream of.

Another big advance is the ability to communicate. In yesteryear, people had to gather at the local coffee shop or seed dealer to talk about what was going on, or to ask questions. Today, we can call anywhere in the world, at any time of the day or night and talk to almost anyone. If you don't want to talk, just send an email. And we have recently learned we can use Zoom to have conversations with many people, just like at the coffee shop.

There are a few things about the old days that maybe I liked better. But for the most part, I don't want to go back and give up all of the advances our society has made. I might just need to make a few choices to help slow down the speed of my life.

Don't forget to utilize the technology and advances we have available to us. Utilize opportunities to get information for the best decisions possible. It can make your operation more sustainable.