

I opened the stainless-steel door and began to examine the many shelves. The icy cold world that I frequently visit poured out in front of me. I saw a half full gallon of milk, some balsamic glaze, and a large bag of red potatoes. Nothing I noticed was worthy of clenching my hunger. Finally, my eyes gazed upon a honey crisp apple in the back of my refrigerator that looked perfectly red with no brown spots. I quickly grabbed it and as I took a bite, my mind ran wild. Not only did I taste the sweet flavor of the apple but also the dedication effort that it took to bring this delicate piece of produce into my home. Before the pandemic, I would have had my feast without thinking twice, though, in our current world crisis, I let my thoughts overtake me. This singular apple must have had to take a journey to get in my hands. I contemplate how this pandemic has affected all workers in the produce industry whether it be the people picking oranges in Florida and peaches in Georgia to my closest friends working at local grocery stores as cashiers, or even the many people transporting these goods around the world. I begin to not only develop an understanding of what they do but more importantly a deep appreciation for their great sacrifices. I look into the vibrant red sphere in my hands and envisage the individual lives affected.

While I do not personally know many of the superheroes in the agricultural field, I do know one of their alter egos: my mild-mannered chemistry teacher. Similar to the way I grabbed the honey crisp apple from my fridge, he could have picked the apple directly from his many fields of trees. During school hours, he explains the fundamental nature of matter and how molecules complexly interact, yet, at home, he works endlessly to harvest food. One could say two jobs of such importance is an immense challenge in a regular year. Though, during a pandemic, it is needless to say that this is of tremendous difficulty. Having to change a course wide curriculum to cater to new standards of normal is stressful and time consuming.

Consideration of student's time, mental states, and education is all in his hands along with his personal health. Yet, he not only risks his life to teach high school students but also to feed his community. In a time where transportation is limited and staff is miniscule, local farmers are fundamental. Their produce and products are necessary for people to have dinner on their tables and food in their bellies. Many Americans may not have realized local farmers' critical roles a few months ago, though now, they have put them on a pedestal with doctors and scientists. They have people's lives in their hands and cannot stop working no matter the circumstance. Their essential acts are holding our country together in a time where everything has changed. My simple chemistry teacher is now one of the most crucial people in our community. He has risen above the many challenges thrown his way and now wears a cape in the eyes of all the people he impacts.

Like my teacher, my best friend also plays a key part in the produce industry. She is essential. She is vital. She is a cashier. What started as a minimum wage job to pay for new clothes and unimportant purchases has turned into a critical role in our society. Without employees like her working long hours in unsafe conditions, consumers would be unable to obtain their needs. Therefore, they must work, they must persevere, and they must be soldiers. The grocery store can be looked at as a war zone in the sense that it is of great danger. Grocery stores naturally attract large crowds of worried people frantically securing food for their families. This alone puts workers at risk. Yet, this is not what my friend fears the most, she fears the people who defy regulations and purposely put others in deadly situations. I have received countless calls from her of stories that not only show the lack of appreciation she receives but also the tremendous human indecency that people have. She once called me on her break crying in frustration. She shared the story to me of how a lady went through her line mask less. As

uncomfortable as this already was, the lady worsened the situation by approaching my friend with a smug grin on her face, chuckling the statement, “I feel very sick and decided to not wear a mask. Have a good day.” My friend explained how her heart sunk deep into her soul, her body began to shake, and how her eyes became filled with tears. Though, like the soldier she is, she had to continue her job and duty. After all, her basic responsibilities are now more important than ever. She is required to overcome the difficulties of her daily job and go above and beyond just by attending work the next day.

I do not personally know many of the essential workers in the produce industry devoting their lives to making a difference, but I can imagine how much they do. They are the reason people have some regularity in their lives, the reason people know dinner will be on the table tonight and the reason that there is no doubt that food will be available tomorrow. As we know, the produce industry is powered by the local farmers, the delivery teams, the management and even the minimum wage cashiers. The industry is powered by people. People have long debated the nature of goodness and whether it should be judged by thoughts or actions. I think it is a combination, but the balance should weigh towards action. The modern-day essential workers without a doubt have proven this and their actions have changed worlds large and small.

I look down at my apple once again and finally take another bite. Along with the apple I also swallow knowledge, appreciation and acknowledgement to the people who helped get it to my hands.