

Quarles: Food insecurity increased during pandemic

By Keith Lawrence
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A year ago, Americans saw nearly bare shelves in some supermarkets for the first time, Ryan Quarles, Kentucky's agriculture commissioner, told the Owensboro Rotary Club on Wednesday.

In the online meeting, he said that other than periods like the Civil War and the Great Depression, Americans have never faced starvation.

But food insecurity did increase last year during the coronavirus pandemic.

He said before the pandemic, one in seven Kentuckians faced food insecurity.

During the pandemic, that increased to one in five, Quarles said.

And for children in school, it increased from one in five to one in four, he said.

The problem lingers, Quarles said, with 80,000 Kentuckians still waiting to receive their first unemployment check.

He told Rotarians that this is National Agriculture Week.

Daviess County, Quarles said, is a top producer of corn, soybeans and wheat.

And, he said, it's the top hog producer in the state.

Quarles said he has a bottle of bourbon from Green River Distilling Co. in his office.

But, he said, "You'd be surprised at the amount of agricultural illiteracy in the state."

Quarles said 20% of students don't know that cheese is a dairy product and that a hamburger is made from beef, not ham.



Ryan Quarles

And, he said, a surprising number believe that chocolate milk comes from brown cows.

Each farmer, Quarles said, feeds 170 people.

He has served as Kentucky's agriculture commissioner since 2016 and was re-elected in 2019, carrying 117 of the state's 120 counties.

Quarles currently serves as vice president of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture and president of the Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

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