

Basic Economics: Interdependence

Another of the most basic terms in the study of economics is *Interdependence*. It is a big word, but it means "dependent on others for some needs." In other words, you can't produce everything you need.

If you live on a farm, you might grow all your own fruits and vegetables. You might have cows and chickens to give you milk and eggs. You might have pigs to give you meat. You might not ever need to go to a grocery store for food. But you probably don't make your own farm equipment. You are *dependent* on someone else for those things. If someone else didn't make the hoes and the rakes and the tractors that your family uses, you wouldn't be able to produce all that food.

And unless you live on a farm, you are *dependent* on others for all kinds of food. Farmers today usually specialize in one or a few kinds of food that they grow to sell to other people. Rarely do you see one farm that sells fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy products. A farmer might grow several different kinds of fruits or a few different kinds of vegetables. This farmer then sells these fruits or vegetables to grocery stores or markets or even other countries.

Some food grows better in certain areas of the world. Rice grows very well in China and in Southeast Asia. It doesn't grow so well in the African desert. So, many people who live in China and Southeast Asia grow rice, which they then sell to people around the world. If you live in the African desert and you want to eat rice, you are *dependent* on other people to grow that rice and sell it to you.

What else do you use in your daily life? Do you listen to a radio or watch television? Someone else probably made that and you or your family bought it. Those books and comic books you read were written, printed, and sold by someone else. All you did was buy them. If you want to listen to the radio, watch TV, or read a book, you are *dependent* on someone else to make those things.

What about the clothes you wear? Those are probably made by

other people. (Some people still make many of their own clothes, though.) If you or your family doesn't make all its own clothes, then you probably buy clothes at a store or a market. These clothes are made by other people, either in your country or in other countries. Again, we see the idea of *dependence*. You *depend* on other people to make the clothes you wear.

In fact, we can now talk about the idea of *interdependence*. Things like food, clothing, radios, TVs, and books are made by people all around the world. Some people can make things better than others. Some foods grow more easily in some countries than in others.

If you are a farmer who grows vegetables, you will want to spend all your time growing vegetables because you can make money doing it. You won't want to spend your time trying to grow other kinds of food that don't grow well in the area where you live. So, you grow and sell your vegetables and buy the other kinds of food you eat. If you work at a factory that makes radios, then your company will want to spend its time making radios and not trying to also grow its own food. Your company makes a lot of radios and buys the food it feeds you and your fellow workers.

What does all this mean? *Interdependence* is the idea that you as a person *depend* on other people for certain things. The same is true of families, towns, and even countries. The people who use their own hands to make everything they could ever want are rare these days. More common are people like you, who get different things from different people. *Interdependence* is a big word; now you know what it means.