



## Farmer George Washington

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*Jim Ruen*

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With Presidents' Day just past, I am reminded of a recent visit to Mt. Vernon, the home of George Washington. It was a real eye opener for me. I knew about Washington the soldier and Washington the statesman. I didn't know about Washington the farmer.

Washington took a personal interest in every aspect of his farm, from which animals to breed to what crops to plant and when to harvest. Early on, Washington realized the importance of crop rotation and spreading manure on his soils. Like many of us, he valued compost and designed a covered composting pit to protect its nutrients from excess rain.

For me, one of his most interesting efforts was a planting plow. He mounted a small barrel on the handles of the walk behind plow. Holes in the barrel would allow seed to sprinkle out as the plow moved through the field. A harrow hooked to the plow would break up clumps and cover the seed. Washington's goal was for one man to plow and plant a field by himself, a savings in precious labor.

George Washington's planting plow is long gone. Only descriptions of it remain. What isn't gone is his heritage. It is carried on by every farmer, no matter what size his or her operation. When you modify a tool or an implement, plant a tree or a garden, or consider which young animal to keep for breeding and which to feed out or sell, you are walking in his footsteps. Washington wanted only to be remembered as a farmer...what a noble ambition for us all.

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