

CBS NEWS “Eye on the Road” Tour Stops in SYLVANIA, GA.

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Eye On The Road

Ben Boyd farms peanuts, cotton, and corn near Sylvania, Ga. His tractors burn through about 500 gallons of diesel a day. The recent spike in gas prices are cutting directly into his bottom line.
(Photo: CBS/Mark LaGanga)

Eye On The Road, Day Two

May 2, 2006



CBS News correspondent Sharyn Alfonsi (CBS)

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E-MAIL

We hope you'll follow along all this week on the *CBS Evening News* and e-mail us at eyeontheroad@cbs.com. We'd love to hear from you.

(CBS) CBS News correspondent Sharyn Alfonsi's Web-exclusive road diary on how Americans are coping with the high price of gas.

On The Road To Sylvania, Ga.

It's day two of our road trip and we spent the night outside of Brunswick, Ga. Of course, we could be anywhere. This highway exit looks like any other exit anywhere — McDonald's to the right, Burger King to the left, gas stations and an assortment of less than exciting/glamorous/clean motels dotted in between.

The only hint that we're in the South comes at the Huddle House down the road this morning, where the waitress did not flinch when I ordered "sweet tea" for breakfast.

Needless to say, we're looking forward to getting off the highway and into the country. We'll be spending the day in Sylvania, Ga., talking with some farmers who are hurting because of the high price of natural gas.

Ben Boyd farms 4,000 acres of peanuts, cotton, and corn with his brother and father near Sylvania. He's seen the price of fertilizer skyrocket over the last few years (natural gas is the key ingredient). It costs him an additional \$54,000 a year just for fertilizer.

He has about five tractors running a day, each burning 100 gallons of diesel (at \$2.45 a gallon) a day. That's an extra \$1,300 in fuel alone. He told us, "I can't take a whole lot more of that." Boyd says that, "at this point I'm worried about having enough operating capital to put fuel in the tractor and put out the fertilizer" to get his crop in — and more important, to get his crop out.

Smaller farms are struggling, too. Lindy Sheppard farms some 2,000 acres near Sylvania. He says gas prices have pushed him to his tipping point. "Hindsight is 20/20, but if I had to do it all over again, I would have farmed last year and probably wouldn't have farmed this year. I really should have gotten out of it a couple years ago."

If he can't negotiate his way through this year, he might get out of farming all together. He could always sell his land and we'll have another patch of the world that looks like a nondescript highway exit — McDonalds to the right, Burger King to the left.

Farmers Pay Price As Fuel Costs Soar

May 2, 2006



(CBS) Farming is the foundation of Sylvania, Ga. That's where **CBS News correspondent Sharyn Alfonsi** and the Eye on the Road crew met crop duster Robbie McMillan, who's been sweeping over the fields for nearly 30 years.

A few years ago, McMillan was paying \$1.60 a gallon for aviation fuel. Now, it's almost \$5. He doesn't want to, but he has to pass on the extra cost.

"I can only absorb so much," he says.

can only absorb so much," says crop duster Robbie McMillan of soaring fuel prices. **(CBS)**

That means farmers like Ben Boyd end up paying more, too. And that's just the beginning.

QUOTE

"I think it's a matter of national security as much as anything else. If you like being dependent on foreign oil, you're gonna love being dependent on foreign food."

Every single day, Boyd spends more than \$1,300 just fueling up his five tractors. That's twice what he was paying just two years ago.

"We try to reduce the trips across the field," Boyd says, "because if I don't make a trip, I don't have to pay for the diesel."

Sylvania, Ga., farmer Ben Boyd

But there's no cutting corners when it comes to fertilizer. Its key ingredient? Natural gas. "Our fertilizer costs are up 48 percent in the last three years," says Boyd. "That's huge for us."

That's an added cost of \$54,000 a year for Boyd ... and down the street, his neighbor, Lindy Shepard, isn't doing much better.

"Hindsight is 20-20," says Shepard. "But if I had to do it all over, I probably wouldn't have farmed this year and probably wouldn't have farmed this year."

Boyd is just hoping to make it *through* this year.

"Without a good year," he says, "I could easily be out of business next year."

Skyrocketing fuel prices threaten to change the landscape of America. Farmers say that could change everything.

"I think it's a matter of national security as much as anything," says Boyd. "If you like being dependent on foreign oil, you're gonna love being dependent on foreign food."

Rising gas prices mean corn that used to cost about \$36 an acre to farm, now costs \$64. Boyd has 4,000 acres. That's a lot of ground to cover and it adds up quickly.