

City Teacher Enthusiastic About Agricultural Materials



City teacher Deborah Marko said her goal is to teach students about the importance of agriculture. She is grateful to the farmers of Lancaster County and to the Pennsylvania Foundation for Better Living for providing information and materials such as a compost jar and a hydroponic garden, which she will use to teach agricultural concepts to her fourth grade students.

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — A fourth grade classroom in inner-city Lancaster is an unlikely place to learn about farming, but if fourth grade teacher Deborah Marko has her way, her students will learn plenty about agriculture.

As Marko arranges a compost jar and a hydroponic garden, she bubbles with enthusiasm for the ideas she received from the teachers' workshop sponsored by the Pennsylvania Foundation for Better Living.

"Wait until the kids see this," she said. "This compost jar makes it so easy to understand how composting works."

Marko was one of 45 Pennsylvania teachers chosen to attend the first workshop sponsored by the Foundation. Its purpose is to instruct teachers on the basic facts of agriculture and provide classroom ideas that will help students understand the impact agriculture has on the world today.

Marko heard about the workshop through Jane Eshelman, the director of the Ag in the Classroom program in Lancaster County.

"Mrs. Eshelman and her husband, a potato farmer, have taught my students and me a lot about agriculture during the six years that they have visited the classroom," Marko said.

Through visits to the farm, Marko was encouraged to grow plants in the classroom to teach her students how to identify fruits and vegetables. She taught her students to use grocery store advertisements to plan meals using only products grown in Pennsylvania.

Eshelman convinced the Lancaster County Farmer's Association to sponsor Marko at the four-day workshop held at Penn State.

Marko was especially delighted with the welcoming speech by Ellis Griffith, a farmer and a Dale Carnegie instructor.

"He immediately grabbed my attention because he wore bib overalls and carried a corn cob pipe, Marko said. "I often dress in costumes to capture the attention of my students so I knew what he was doing. The purpose of his speech

was to destroy any preconceived notions that we harbored about farmers."

Marko said that those ideas were also squelched in her classroom when Mr. and Mrs. Eshelman visited to tell the students about potato farming.

"One of my students remarked, 'They don't look like farmers.' The Eshelmans are always impeccably dressed and appear to be business people, which is just one of the roles that today's farmer has to fulfill," Marko said.

Each session at the workshop, provided handouts or materials that can be used for classroom instruction. These included a bead sprout kit, a session on hydroponics taught them how to assemble a soilless garden, a miniature compost pile is created in a glass jar so that students can watch waste return to useful form.

"In a session on milk, we made cheese and butter. Of course, we sampled the results of our efforts," Marko said.

Field trips also provided a learning source. The workshop included trips to Shaver's Creek Ecological Center for a guided discovery walk and an exhibit of conservation projects. At a mushroom facility,

teachers saw how fungi grow. At the Landscape Management Research Center, teachers learned about the varieties of turf, which is one of the biggest industries in the state. Tours of the Penn State Creamery and a grocery store enabled them to see how products are marketed.

"Wednesday evening was a memorable buffet dinner at the Nittany Lion Inn, where all the items on the buffet table were agricultural products of the Keystone state. No one could dispute the fact that Pennsylvania farmers produce the best food found anywhere!" Marko said.

Now that the workshop is over, Marko said, her job is only beginning. "Passing on the knowledge of agriculture and its importance in Pennsylvania as well as the whole nation is my goal in the classroom. Thanks to the Farmers Association of Lancaster County and to the Pennsylvania Foundation for Better Living, I will be better prepared to do so."

For more information on the Ag in the Classroom program or other Pennsylvania Foundation for Better Living activities, call executive director Beth More at Chambersburg (717) 375-2639.

Ask The Master Food Preserver

Is it alright to use a large pot for boiling water canning if I use a rack.

Yes, if the diameter does not exceed 13 inches and its height permits adding water to at least 1 inch above the jar tops. The rack should be slotted or perforated to allow circulation.

Why did I lose so much liquid in my green beans when I pressure canned them?

Chances are instead of "hot packing" them by boiling them for 5 minutes before potting them in a jar and processing them, you "raw packed" them. Hot packing most foods is an advantage because it removes much of the oxygen, it allows you to put in a larger quantity, the color retention is better over the course of the year, they have a longer shelf life and it keeps foods from floating to top, particularly fruits like peaches. Another way to lose liquid is by

rapidly cooling down the canner, which is not recommended for a number of other safety reasons.

I'm glad to hear you pressure canned them since that is the only safe canning method for low-acid vegetables.

My peaches always float to the top. What am I doing wrong?

Chances are you put them in the jars raw and the trapped oxygen makes them float. Hot packing them by bringing the syrup to a boil over the peaches will eliminate that problem. Using heavy syrups may also increase the tendency for fruit to float. Overtightening the bands can contribute to floating as well.

The Master Food Preservers are trained volunteers for Penn State Cooperative Extension in Cambria County and can be reached by calling (814)472-7986.

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