

Manheim Central Makes Ag Class Mandatory

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course, five days a week, on agriculture exploration.

"I look at farmers differently now. Before, I thought all farmers did was clean out barns and smell bad, but now I see they use a lot of technology," said a ninth grade student at Manheim Central High School.

Another student said, "I'm more aware of how food is used, where it comes from, and of caring for the earth."

The curriculum at Manheim is one that agricultural-related people envision being intergrated in every school.

Deb Seibert, ag science teacher and FFA advisor, said one of the goals of the course is to teach students how agriculture affects every area of their lives.

In the course, students explore environmental technology, plant science, animal production, food processing, and agribusiness.

In a review of plant science, Seibert asked the students, "How many of you could have a career in plant science?"

Almost every hand in the classroom went up.

For not only does the course examine research in plant mutation and genetics but also occupations that are linked to it. Job titles, educational requirements, technical skills, and benefits are listed for many jobs from menial jobs to those requiring doctor's degrees.

This enables students to see the connection between the real-world and academic learning.

Seibert is pleased with the positive reactions she sees from students taking the required course.

Some critics of the program may complained that the required course is too generalized and not production agriculture. But Seibert and her staff recognize that the basic overview of the course exposes students who would never have had any understanding of agriculture and how it affects almost every area of life.

"The biggest advantage is that every kid has a basic foundation — every kid knows what ag is in general. By getting to talk with each on a one to one basis, every student gets the true picture beyond the 'wives' tales' of what ag really is. The exposure to ag during the first year in high school enables a student to choose ag elective courses during the remaining three years."

For the farming community, the advantage is that students' understanding of farming translates into better communication between farming and non-farming neighbors. This understanding promises to infiltrate into the future, when laws pertaining to environment, zoning, food and fiber production,

and processing are decided. These future lawmakers will know that agriculture is the backbone of our world — one that should and needs to be protected.

Ninth-grader Ryan Groff said that he is probably the only student in his class that lives on a farm. Sometimes he becomes a bit bored learning the elementary facts of agriculture since he is so familiar

with the subject, but he believes it is good that students are required to complete the course.

He enjoys the lab work intergrated with the book study. Ryan plans to take more in-depth ag courses and foresees a career in production agriculture. And, Seibert tries to use his expertise by having him share his perspective in the classroom.

The introduction to agriculture is part of the school's district strategic planning called MC 2000. The emphasis is to empower individuals, through development of academic and social skills, to

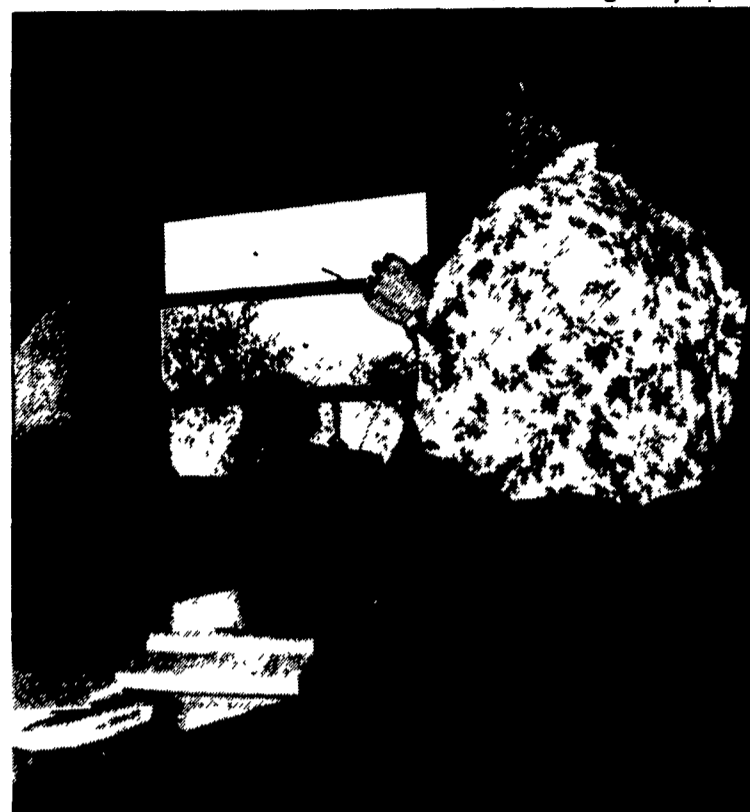
become responsible citizens in a changing world.

"MC 2000 is a coordinated plan designed to prepare students for the 21st century," Seibert said.

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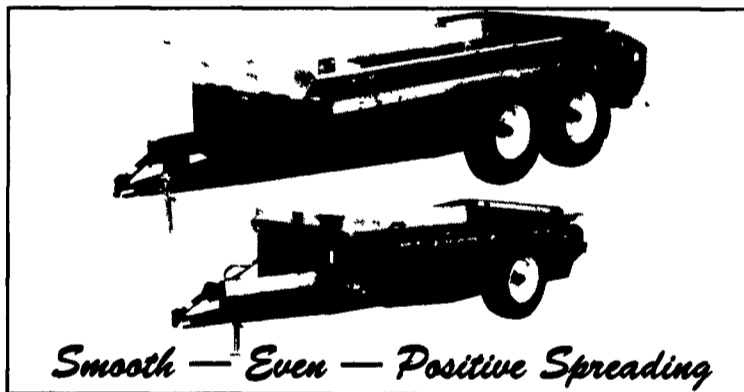
Ryan Groff believes he is the only one in his class from a farm, which gives him a different perspective than most of his classmates.



Seibert teaches plant science as part of the agriculture overall.

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