

Teachers Taught How To Incorporate Ag In The Classroom

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Mifflin Co. Correspondent

"You can see the kids enjoy what they're doing. It shows on their faces," commented one suburban teacher at Penn State's Ag Arena recently. Nearly 100 teachers took part in the Ag in the Classroom program and spent two hours on Saturday at the Ag Arena meeting — up close and personal — all types of farm animals.

"A lot of these people have not had any experience at all being around a farm animal or a live-stock species, and we felt before they could go back to the classroom and teach about it, they needed to be exposed and have the experience themselves," Carrie Stufft said about why she planned this event for the teachers.

A third-grade teacher at East Derry Elementary School in the Mifflin County School District, Stufft attended Ag in the Classroom three years ago and returned these past two years as a presenter.

"In the past, I did as much as I could in an hour's time to educate them about how important animal agriculture is and how it's a vital role in their daily lives — so they could take that back to their classrooms. Now this year, I've taken the extra step and brought the animals to them so they could be exposed to them."

Stufft asked 21 4-H and FFA students from Mifflin County to transport their projects and to station them separately around the arena. Overall, the teachers saw a beef steer, a pig, a sheep, a horse, a goat, a fawn, two dairy cows and nine different breeds of rabbits. The teachers divided into groups of 12, then rotated from station to station every 15 minutes to learn. While most 4-H'ers and FFAers don't hesitate to talk about their animals, most of these students jumped at the chance to do something they rarely get to do — to teach teachers.

"It's a good program," said Matt Kline, an 8-year veteran of both 4-H and FFA. "Many have never had the chance to see and be with agricultural animals."

Matt, from McVeytown, brought his Holstein while Chris Uhland, of Ferguson Valley and an 11th grader at Lewistown Area High School, presented his Brown Swiss milk cow.

"I wanted to show them my animal and to tell them about her," Chris commented. Both said it was a good experience for them and were pleased with how interested the teachers were in learning about each animal.

"I didn't know deer farms existed," said Sandra Handy, a 6th grade teacher in Lehigh County. "I've been to a dairy farm, but I've never seen a pig up close. I admire the kids. It's a lot of work, but more kids should have this opportunity."

"I am learning a lot," added Suzanne McMullen, a first grade teacher in the same county. "I'm fascinated by the goat! How tame it is and how much affection there for these animals. It's like farmers themselves — the dedication these students show."

While students and teachers (in reversed roles) did their part, parents, leaders and planners milled around enjoying the product of their hard work. In addition to Carrie Stufft, Dr. Don Evans, Carol Ann Gregg, Pat Sueck, and a host of committee members worked toward this event.

Dr. Don Evans serves on the board of the Ag Awareness Foundation, the sponsoring group for Ag in the Classroom. Evans is a faculty member in the agricultural and extension education department at Penn State and had served as assistant dean of extension for 10 years.

"The sole purpose is to help people better understand agriculture. Only one percent farm in Pennsylvania today. Our foundation is nonprofit, has a speakers bureau, sponsors the development of videos, submits grants, but Ag in the Classroom is our most active project."

Pat Sueck of York County serves as executive director of the Ag Awareness Foundation. Pat said the sponsorship of teachers for Ag in the Classroom comes from agribusiness, individuals and

other organizations. Many farm organizations such as Farm Bureau and the Grange sponsor teachers in their area for Ag in the Classroom. One of two teachers attending this year from Mifflin County had their tuition paid by her school's home and school association. Evans says there are tax credits for donors. At the end of this session, more than 400 teachers will have participated in Ag in the Classroom in the past five years.

Carol Ann Gregg of Grove City, is education coordinator for the Foundation. In her role, she plans what the teachers will eat, where they will stay, how they'll get from point A to point B, and all the other details.

"We provide boxes of materials for teachers to take back to the classrooms — it's ready to use. Teachers also earn graduate credits or in-service credits for their six days here."

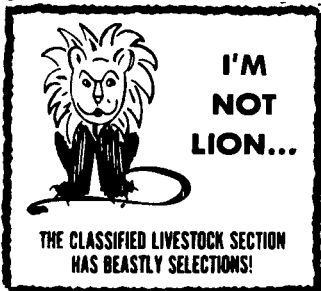
The Foundation received a grant to produce a video. Production starts this week in State College. In it, three children, an actress, and a farmer will talk about plants and animals, and farmers as stewards of the land. Teachers who participated in Ag in the Classroom are developing curriculum to supplement it.



An aerial view of the ag arena shows teachers moving from station to station to learn about animals in agriculture.



Carol Ann Gregg, education coordinator for the AG Awareness Foundation which sponsors Ag in the Classroom, addresses about 100 teachers before they break into smaller groups to "meet" a variety of farm animals at Penn State's Ag Arena.



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