

Mentoring Program Matches Students With Agriculturists

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— Fifty-one-year-old Marvin Sauder is back in school. He is neither student or teacher, but is part of the newly formed mentoring program of the Cloister FFA.

The mentoring program is the brainchild of Mrs. Jodi Brown and Mr. Ernest Orr, both FFA advisors. Structured to fit into the Supervised Agricultural Experience Program (SAE), a required year-round project, the mentoring program pairs each student with an adult who has experience in the field the student is pursuing.

Brown said, "To my knowledge, we are the only FFA chapter with a mentoring program."

Members of the Ephrata Area Young Farmers Association volunteered as mentors. In October, students met mentors for the first time when they held a mentor night.

After the first meeting, students worked on an approved practice and budget plan. On it, students listed projected cost and time requirements.

These plans were reviewed by mentors at the next meeting. In some cases, students were advised that the costs were unrealistic and adjustments needed to be made. Mentors also pointed out details that students overlooked.

Most people assume that FFA students are from farm background, but many students live in town or in the suburbs where large animal projects and crop harvesting is impossible. These students pursue projects such as breeding rodents, fishing worms, or home improvements.

Ideally a student should be matched with a mentor who has experience in the same area that the student is pursuing. However, this is not always possible.

While a mentor might not have experience in breeding rodents, Brown said that the basic concepts and record keeping of buying breeding stock, feeding, and selling the offspring are adaptable from breed to breed.

"Your role is to act as advisor, look over the student's plans, ask questions, and evaluate the student's work," Brown instructed mentors.

In some instances, mentors have more contact with students. Andrea Bender made arrangements to garden at her mentor's (Mary Schantz's) home. In most cases, students will not be visiting their mentors' homes, but the amount of interaction is left to the discretion of the mentor.

Through the SAE projects, students have the opportunity to earn awards and make money if their projects are successful. Incentives for mentors are not monetary but many mentors expressed the senti-

ments of Ephrata dairy farmer Marvin Sauder, who said, "My two daughters benefited from raising horses. Although it's an expensive hobby with no profit, they got a lot of pleasure out of horses. Now that my daughters are grown, I'm still interested in kids and thought maybe I could help with the mentoring program."

After the first two meetings, Sauder is enthusiastic about the mentoring program.

"I was really impressed with how much my student knew and how realistic her budget is," he said.

Some unexpected links arose from the mentoring relationships. In Sauder's case, he discovered that the horse his daughter sold when she went to college was the same one that his mentoring student rode for horse lessons.

"She reminds me so much of my daughter. It's fun to be a participant," he said.

In some cases, mentors see themselves as parental influences. Tom Bollinger said to a student, "I used to tell my sons and I'll tell you. You learn the most by watching how something is done."

This is the second year for the program. Brown said that 30 years



Brandy Good shows her projected budget to mentor Marvin Sauder.

ago, ag classes were much smaller and centered on traditional agricultural projects. With larger classes and 15 diverse projects, mentors can help fill the gap that Brown and Orr do not have time to oversee.

This is the second year for the mentoring program. Previous participants were asked their opinions on how the program could be improved. Problems that surfaced during the first year have been addressed and Brown expects the program to run more smoothly.

One of the most prevalent problems last year was communication between mentor and student. Wrong phone numbers and hesi-

tancy about what was expected of participants hindered involvement. This was eased this year by Brown initiating face-to-face meetings between mentors and students.

Mentor Mike Brubaker emphasized that students needed to see the relationship between their projects and their career goals.

"Perhaps they won't raise rodents as a career. But they can transfer the knowledge they gained in starting and finishing a project. And, this should be pointed out to them," Brubaker said.

Participants in this year's program will be expected to help next year's program's users.



FFA advisor Jodi Brown discusses the program with a mentor.



These are some of the 30 mentors who work with 45 participating FFA students in the mentoring program established by the Cloister FFA in Ephrata.

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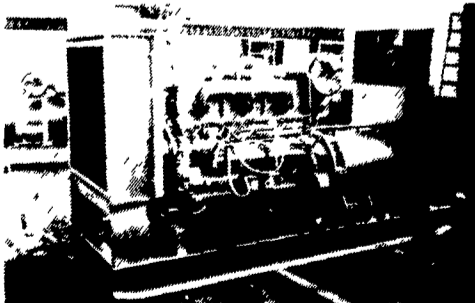
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