

Fun And Learning Meet At Liberty Elementary Ag Day

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"I was surprised about how little they knew about sheep," said Mr. Norman. They were really interested in the coyotes and the wolves and whether a sheep dog would attack the sheep (as they had seen in movies). They asked about things that they had seen and wondered if it was right."

Each child got to feel the wool and learned about the lamb's diet.

"The whole day worked out very well. It's good to see that they want to learn more about agriculture. In my talk, I pulled out a briar and some grass and asked the kids if they would eat these things. I explained that we let the sheep go out and eat these things, and then we can get food from the sheep," Mr. Norman said.

Following the sheep lesson, the students again divided themselves into teams to compete in a sack race.

The next stop along the trail was learning about dogs with Colleen Brenneman. There students got an up close look at 165-pound Atticus and 135-pound Devon.

"I gave a talk about how dogs worked on farms," said Ms. Brenneman. "I told them the history of Great Danes." The Great Dane breed is the Pennsylvania State Dog.

Ms. Brenneman also was quick to give pointers about behavior around animals.

"I told them they didn't have to be afraid because it was a large dog. I told them how to approach a dog and that they need to pay attention to the animal."

Ms. Brenneman, who is a speech and language arts teacher at the school, was wholly supportive of all the activities. "When I talked to the kids later, they said they really enjoyed the whole day. I think its great that we were promoting farm life. I'm constantly impressed at the sense of community and unity in Liberty. You really feel like you're part of the whole, and that's not a feeling you get a lot anymore."

After a chance to greet the two friendly pets, the classes again divided into two groups and participated in a dog biscuit relay. Using a clothespin which was held in their mouths, students had to pass a dog biscuit down the line until the last person dropped the biscuit into a dog dish.

From dogs to doggies, the classes next participated in a branding iron exercise. Students had to try to finish the spring round-up first using a branding iron and a covered tin can (the calf). The students had to run to pick up the can, open

it up, blow a whistle, put the whistle back in the can and run back to the line to tap the next participant.

This activity was followed by a talk about maple syrup, honey, and field crops that farmers grow.

Sue Heyler will always remember the look on the children's faces when they smelled the silage.

"I knew I needed to have something to get their attention," said Mrs. Heyler. "I let them smell the silage and you should have seen their faces! I said, can you imagine that a cow eats 50 pounds of that stuff a day?"

Eating was on the mind of many other students who asked if humans could eat some of the same things that cows eat.

"One class was shelling oats and eating them," said Mrs. Heyler. "We told them that this is what is used to make some cereals."

In most of the groups, the kids had so many questions that the time passed quickly. One question about bees stumped even the presenter.

"They asked how many eggs a queen bee lays in a day. I didn't know the answer, so I had to look it up. It turns out that a good queen will lay about 1,000 eggs a day," Mrs. Heyler said.

The next stop for the children was at Nancy Vollman's post. She and her 7-month-old Nubian goat entertained kids and answered lots of questions such as "How much does she weigh?" "How old is she?"

"Ours is a pet. I told them that we've had her since she was three days old and that we kept her in the basement and fed her with a bottle. When she was big enough, we moved her outside," said Mrs. Vollman.

Applied math was the focus of the next activity. Each team was allowed to spit seeds as far as they could. After a couple of practice spits, each participant tried to out spit the competition with the best out of three tries. They then measured the distances and estimated how far an entire class could spit seeds.

After the final measurements were in, the class moved to the next activity, where Gilbert Harris gave them an up-close look at two hogs and explained all the different uses for a pig.

"I think the thing they were most interested in was the fact that we use the whole pig and that you can use the heart valves from a pig for a

human heart. My grandfather used to say we use everything but the squeal," Mr. Harris said with a laugh.

The children were also interested in actually seeing where the various cuts of meat are on the hog. The day for Mr. Harris meant having a golden opportunity to teach kids about the food supply. "Ignorance breeds hatred," he said.

"If they're not taught, they don't understand the whole process and that just creates problems for the farmer. This is a chance where we can really tell the kids where the food comes from. A lot of kids don't know that. It's not just from a grocery store, there are farmers out there."

Mr. Harris also liked the idea that the learning was mixed with fun activities.

"It was a big day for the kids. They would play a game and then they were ready to sit down and listen to what was going to happen next," he said.

Since a large part of a hog's diet is corn, the students had to try their hand at corn shucking after the presentation. Teams had fun as they raced to be the first to have shucked all of their corn.

The next stop along the trail involved learning about horses. Jeff Rush brought two horses, a Belgian draft horse and a registered Paint riding horse.

"I showed the kids the comparison in size and talked about the different uses of the horses. I also showed them how to drive a draft horse," Rush said.

Mrs. Thomas though the kids really enjoyed learning that the draft horses respond to commands in their own language; gee for right, and ha for left.

"I called it horse language," said Mr. Rush.

Students were also concerned that placing shoes on the horses' feet might hurt the horse.

"I assured them that it did not hurt them if the nails were properly placed," added Mr. Rush. "I thought there was a lot of interest and fascination on the part of the kids."

After learning about horses, kids again divided into teams for the "horseshoe" toss using rubber rings. The team with the most points won the game.

The next stop of the day was at the rabbit pen. Presenter Sally Vaughn was pleased that rabbits were included in the activities.

"People don't usually think of rabbits as a farm animal," noted Mrs. Vaughn, "so I was glad to represent rabbits and let kids know that rabbits are used for meat and fur, not just cute, cuddly pets."

In the past, the Vaughns have raised New Zealand rabbits for meat. Presently they have only two pet rabbits, a Rex and a Dutch.

"They're both pet and show rabbits," noted Mrs. Vaughn. "Most of the kids wanted to tell about their pet rabbits. An amazing number of kids had pet rabbits."

The twelfth stop of the day was at the dairy station. Students learned about dairy cows and got

to try their hand at milking using a rubber glove filled with water.

"In a rural community like Liberty, we often feel that the kids know about farm animals and farming. But the truth is, some people live in the country all their lives and never set foot on a working farm," said Carolyn Moyer who talked about the dairy cows.

All the children paid close attention as they learned about how much milk a cow gives every day (70 pounds for Gracie the Jersey), how much water she drinks (about a bathtub full) and what types of food she eats (silage, grain, hay and grass). The kids also learned about the different breeds of dairy cows and how long it takes for a calf to grow into a full-grown milk producing cow.

"Many kids didn't realize that the cow had to have a calf before she could be milked," said Mrs. Wirth. "They were also amazed at how you feed the animals and that you have to put in nutrients and really watch the balance. They think you just put the animal out to pasture. They didn't know the diet has to be regulated in order for them to produce."

Mrs. Moyer also told the kids about the importance of drinking milk and coached them in a brainstorming session about the different products we make from milk.

"We talked about the benefits of drinking milk especially the protein and the calcium and I asked them how many liked to drink milk. Lots of kids raised their hands. Then I asked them how many of them would rather drink a can of soda. Some hands went up, but when we talked about the good things you get in milk compared to the sugar you get from soda, the kids realized that they needed their milk," she said.

In order to make the Ag Day work, cooperation was needed from all the teachers, the students and the farmers.

"The teachers enjoyed it too," said Mrs. Thomas. "They were very supportive. We were so excited that everyone could come and spend the whole day. That everyone could be there that day was a miracle in itself," said Mrs. Wirth who was impressed that the volunteers were ready to do the whole thing again next year.

By organizing the Ag Day, Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Wirth were able to share a little bit of the knowledge that they gained at the Ag in the Classroom workshop with the entire school in hopes that the children will learn to appreciate the origin of their food.

Both Mrs. Wirth and Mrs. Thomas would recommend the Ag In the Classroom program to all teachers. "To see these farmers presenting this information is really neat. Farmers work so hard," said Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Wirth said, "The fact that it was actually people working in agriculture who made these presentations was great. That way we got firsthand experience."



For Holly Roupp, a sixth grader, working with the lamb was the best part of Ag Day.



Gracie the Jersey was on her best behavior as five sixth grade girls give her an affectionate pat.



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