

Kids Korner

Kids Experience Life On The Farm Through Ag In The Classroom

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Food And Family
 Features Editor

REINHOLDS (Lancaster Co.) — Meadowview Farms offered students from the Ephrata School District an expansive view of the latest in dairy farming.

As part of the Ag in the Classroom studies last week, about 300 fourth graders had the opportunity to visit the farm and see firsthand how milk is produced.

The tour included a hay ride through the barns and around the grounds and a view of the whole dairying process from the observation deck.

Meadowview Farm is owned by the David and Joyce Zimmerman family. Zimmerman said the farm has been in the family since 1912, when his great grandparents purchased it.

The farm operated as a typical family farm until about a year and a half ago, when they decided to expand the facilities so that their adult children could make a career on the farm.

The Zimmermans went from milking 80 cows to 650. Replacements are born on the farm but moved at three weeks of age to a Lebanon County farm until the heifers freshen.



Fourth grade students from Highland Elementary School tour the Zimmerman farm by riding on a wagon, which took them through the barns and around the property.

The six-row barn with a slotted floor makes the work easier.

Son James showed the children the types of feed used to keep cows healthy.

James pulled a sliver of glass from the feed and asked the chil-

dren how that got into the cow's feed.

Someone discarded a glass soft drink bottle in the field. When the tractor driver was mowing the fields, the glass was hidden by the corn and inadvertently chopped into the feed.

James explained that a magnet is inserted into each cow's stomach to keep metal that is accidentally swallowed from hurting the cows. But the magnet does not attract glass and aluminum cans, which can kill a cow.

Sue Bollinger, who heads the Ephrata School District's Ag in the Classroom program and who also lives on a dairy farm, explained about helping a calf grow up to be healthy and give milk.

Students were told that all cows grow horns. If the horns are allowed to grow full-size, the horns could hurt other cows and humans. The calves are dehorned at 15 months of age when the horns are about thumb-sized and called a horn bud.

"Does it hurt?" a student asked.

"A little, but it would hurt other cows much worse if they weren't dehorned," Sue said.

She showed them how semen from Wisconsin bulls are stored in a nitrogen tank at 360 degrees below zero. She stuck a rubber band inside to show how the instant cold froze the band, which

snapped like a sliver of hard plastic.

Sue explained how calves are similar to human babies, who need to be fed milk replacer similar to baby formula. Cows cannot give milk unless they give birth to a calf. Generally a cow is two



Sue Bollinger, who coordinates the Ephrata School District Ag in the Classroom program for 15 years, explains how calves are cared for on the farm.



The observation deck is open to visitors every day. The barns and the milking operation can be clearly viewed. Details about the process are clearly displayed to enable visitors to participate in a self-guided tour.



Lancaster County Dairy Princess Kari Martin, left, and her sister Jenna, who is a dairy ambassador, handed out ice cream and taught students the importance of including milk in their diets.



Students answer questions to reveal how much they grasped about dairy farming.



David and Joyce Martin, with the help of their children, Sharon, James, Dale, and Cathy, operate Meadowview Farm. The farm, which has been in the Zimmerman family for about 100 years, was recently expanded to 230 acres. New barns and a milking parlor with observation deck were also built. The Martins milk 650 cows three times daily.

years old when it has its first calf. The cows gives milk for seven months, before having a "vacation," when it is dry two months before starting the cycle over again.

An observation deck on the second floor enabled the students to see the milking process from start to finish.

Zimmerman said, "Visitors can come without an appointment to watch. It's safe, and it doesn't interfere with people who are milking."

In addition to family members, Zimmerman said, "We have an excellent labor force — 12 employees, mostly part-time."

Lancaster County Dairy Princess Kari Martin and her sister Dairy Ambassador Jenna Martin were on hand to hand out ice cream. They used charts to explain how milk has protein, vitamin A, thiamine, riboflavin, calcium, and iron.

"Soda has none of those nutrients, so milk is a much better choice," Kari said.

Students expressed amazement to hear that to receive the same amount of calcium that an eight-ounce glass of milk provides, they would need to eat 304 cups of popcorn, eight pounds of tuna, seven cups of broccoli, 7 cups of red beans, or 10 large fried eggs.

FFA students from Ephrata High School helped with the tour. Several "learn stations" were set up to teach farming basics.

Sixteen-year-old Kathy Zimmerman helps milk the cows on the family farm and is also an FFA student. She said of the recently expanded operation, "It is much easier to milk and more fun."

She explained the milking process to the students and said the band around each cow's neck contains a radio transmitter. It detects the cow's motion. An active cow reveals that a cow might be in heat. A less active cow than normal shows she might be sick or injured.

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