4-H Ag Literacy Teaches Youth Where Their Food and Fiber Comes From

Cole Meador
Extension Assistant

Agricultural literacy is vital in today's society. Each year more and more people lose touch with where their food, fiber and fuel come from. More and more youth think their food comes from the store and have no idea their bread, meat, cheese, pastas, milk, eggs, juice, etc. were originally raw materials grown by farmers.

Agriculture touches each of our lives daily and is Nebraska's number one industry — one in three jobs are related to agriculture. Ag literacy is one of the five signature outcome areas of Nebraska 4-H.

Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County has been teaching ag literacy as part of the Lancaster County 4-H program in a variety of ways for many years.

Ag Awareness Festival

The Agricultural Awareness Festival in Lincoln teaches nearly 600 4th graders how their food is raised from farm to fork. Lancaster County 4-H started the festival in 2000 with the help of various commodity boards. The festival has grown from one day to two days and is held at the Lancaster Event Center.

Presenters teach the basics of agriculture and why these animals, crops and technology are so important to our day-to-day lives. Students rotate through various sessions including: beef, pork, poultry, dairy, crops, by-products, water and agricultural technology. Students have the opportunity to interact with animals and climb on farm equipment, which is a first for many who attend.

Annette Davidson, a 4th grade teacher at Eagle Elementary, said, "We enjoy bringing our students to this event because it provides a strong connection with our study of Nebraska and reinforces the importance of agriculture in their daily lives. Students always enjoy the various activities.”

Lancaster County Super Fair

For over 135 years, the Lancaster County Fair has celebrated agriculture, youth and community. Hosted by the Lancaster County Agricultural Society, Lancaster County 4-H coordinates the 4-H & FFA youth events and exhibits, as well as many ag literacy experiences.

The Super Fair is a great opportunity for urban residents to learn about agriculture and where their food comes from. There are many crop and horticulture exhibits.

The public can see hundreds of farm animals up close, including cattle, pigs, chickens, sheep and goats. The fair has educational displays in the animal areas explaining breeds, colors and purposes of each species. Many 4-H/FFA animal exhibitors are eager to talk to fairgoers about their animals and let people pet their animals.

Since the 1980s, Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County has coordinated a "Fair Fun Day" for child care groups with youth K–4. Teen volunteers (mostly 4-H youth) give the groups guided tours of the fair, with an emphasis on learning about the different animals, crops and where their food comes from.

Last year, 17 teenagers gave tours for 10 child care groups with approximately 300 youth.

Bailee Gunnever, a Fair Fun Day tour guide, said, "Out of all the things I love doing in 4-H, my favorite thing is talking with kids about my animals because I love the faces they make when I tell them interesting facts.”

In 2006, Lancaster County developed an Animal Exploration Guide for after-school and summer sites with youth K–4. This curriculum includes information, fun facts and activities about various animals at the Lancaster County Super Fair. A 4-H staff member visits many of the summer sites to talk about the fair and animals.

Go Go Goat Getters & Pick-a-Pig 4-H Clubs

Two 4-H clubs target urban and non-urban youth who do not have the opportunity to raise a farm animal on their own. Pick-a-Pig was started in 2009 and Go Go Goat Getters started last year. These youth have the opportunity to raise a pig or goat and then show it at the Super Fair. With both clubs, the animals are housed at a local farm. Youth meet weekly at the farm to learn about and care for their animals. After the fair, the animals are marketed. The majority of these kids have had no hands-on experience with a farm animal. They learn these animals will eventually go into the food chain.

Thomas Cook, a member of the Pick-a-Pig club, said, "I learned pigs provide us pork chops, ham and bacon from the Pick-a-Pig club.

Llama/Alpaca Club

The Star City Llama and Alpaca 4-H club allows youth to raise a llama or alpaca and show it at the Super Fair. Many of the club members do not have the opportunity to house a large animal. Through the club, youth can borrow or lease a llama or alpaca. Members learn the fiber that llamas produce is used in many products such as warm clothing and yarn.

Embryology

Since the 1970s, the 4-H Embryology school enrichment program has been a favorite classroom activity in Lancaster County. It is part of Lincoln Public Schools’ 3rd grade core science curriculum. About 4,000 Lancaster County 3rd graders in 55 schools participate. In Embryology, students learn about the life cycle by hatching chicks in their classrooms. Students also learn ag information about eggs such as grading, parts of, and different colors. The chicks used in Embryology are “layers” and students learn these chickens are raised to provide eggs for people to eat.

Lancaster County 4-H also features an “EGG Cam” (online at http://go.unl.edu/eggcam) which livestreams chicks hatching and has many educational resources.

Clover College

The annual 4-H Clover College offers a variety of workshops which teach about ag literacy. Recent workshops have included sheep, cattle, chickens, rabbits and pizza farm.

Group Presentations

Throughout the year, various groups ask 4-H staff to give ag literacy presentations and/or provide educational materials.

4-H Also Teaches Youth How to Raise Animals and Plants

For over 100 years, 4-H has taught agricultural education to youth who help raise their own animals and plants. Popular 4-H projects continue to include cattle, horses, poultry, swine, sheep, goats, rabbits, vegetables and fruit.

Youth in 4-H animal projects learn how to properly care for and train their animals, and other good animal husbandry practices. 4-H also offers in-depth animal knowledge such as judging, breed identification, facts and more.

Youth in 4-H plant projects learn how to grow plants from seed to harvest.

CONNECT WITH US
Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County
1414 Cherry Creek Road, Suite A
Lincoln, NE 68528
402-441-7180
http://lancaster.unl.edu

IN THIS ISSUE
Food & Health . . . . 2
Family Living . . . . 3
Farm & Acreage . . . 4
Horticulture . . . . . 5
Pests & Wildlife . . . 5
4-H & Youth . . . . . 6-7

During the Lancaster County Super Fair, many 4-H & FFA animal exhibitors share their animals with fairgoers, including child care groups who are given tours of the fair as part of Fair Fun Day.