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TOP STORY

Gallatin Farm Fair provides unique learning experience

JODI HAUSEN, Chronicle Staff Writer May 9, 2013



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Hyalite Elementary School student Rowan Lunceford, 9, admires Smarty, a 16-year-old quarter horse as he listens to it's owner Peggy Lucas, not pictured, talks about horse care and agriculture during the Farm Fair at Brainard Ranch Wednesday morning.

Belgrade farmer LaVonne Stucky was shocked when she overheard a school boy at the Gallatin Farm Fair last year say that he thought water came from the grocery store.

“That’s our most basic need,” Stucky said Wednesday. “And he thinks it comes from the grocery store.”

That’s exactly why volunteers with the Gallatin Valley Agriculture Committee have gotten together for the last nine years to bring nearly 1,000 county fourth-graders to Ed and Punky Brainard’s ranch east of Manhattan.

Why do the Brainards agree to host each year?

“It’s just a great opportunity for a lot of these kids to learn where their food comes from and get a taste of farm life,” Ed Brainard said.

With two lambs in a small pen as part of their “Ewe to You” booth, Stucky, Tina Gilchrist and Mary Melander showed kids how wool goes from fleece to the spinning wheel to knitted mittens.

At other stations, kids milked a cow and a goat, dug potatoes and handled beeswax and honeycombs.

They eagerly scarfed “kick-the-can” ice cream they’d made in 10 minutes, rolling a can across a wide table to each other.

They learned how grain is grown, milled into flour and made into bread. They saw how horses are shod. They met Mickey the piglet and learned that in six months he will grow from 5 to 250 pounds.

Looking at busy bees in a honeycomb, they learned it takes about 5,000 bees to make 8 ounces of honey.

Playing games, they learned what can be found in the forest and how beef products are used in everything from food to crayons, glue, cosmetics and medicines.

They also got a 20-minute hayride behind seven of the valley’s most majestic two-horse teams.

Kayla Lemire with the Gallatin National Forest said kids are so consumed by video games, it’s good for them to see a real farm.

“This is a great program for the kids to come out and learn about their environment,” she said. “It’s nice to have it out here so they make the connection between the forest and farms and what they get from them.”

the end of today, more than 80 volunteer presenters from local farms and ranches, Montana State University, 4-H, Belgrade High School, Gallatin Cattlewomen, Gallatin County and the U.S. Forest Service will have given the same demonstration 48 times to 988 Gallatin County fourth graders over three days.

“When it comes to Farm Fair, everybody pulls their weight,” said Belgrade Chamber of Commerce Director Deb Youngberg.

A.C. Holznagel had just successfully milked a goat at her Hawthorne School group’s sixth station.

“I didn’t really know how to do it at first,” she said. “I think I may have squirted that girl who was showing me.”

Her favorite station: the ice cream.

“I’m sure it will be my favorite even when we get done,” she said. “I thought the honey bees were pretty cool, too, and the little pig.”

When asked what she’s learned, Zenash Bradford didn’t hesitate.

“Pigs are the cutest animals ever,” she said.

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