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Berkheiser

Continued from E25

based — working to raise a crop or livestock. Today, the projects are as varied as the students.

Each year, the freshman agriculture class has a rabbit-raising project to provide an agricultural experience for students, teaching the challenges of raising livestock. Each student receives a rabbit to breed, monitor and care for.

"It's to give them an experience and see how to respond to problems you might have," Berkheiser said, adding that he will reference the students' work with the rabbits when trying to tie in different aspects of animal science.

As more mandates are placed on secondary education, agriculture education has to incorporate many of the requirements in its curriculum to reinforce the teaching points.

"We need to help the rest of the teachers meet these goals," Berkheiser said.

While it has changed how he might teach some lesson plans, he is positive that the hands-on, real-world learning in the agriculture classroom can help students better grasp concepts.

If a student develops a passion for a subject area through the classroom and FFA programming, it drives learning. For some of his students, it has resulted in a career. For others, it was the driver to keep the student in school until graduation.

"We can show a relevance to what they are learning and that they want to learn more," he said.

Berkheiser always teaches the four agriculture classes at the school, but he said he enjoys switching up class plans based on student interest.

For example, when he has a group of "dairy" students, he will

add more advanced elements to the animal science portion to encourage additional learning.

During the course of his career, Berkheiser has had more than 10 student teachers in his classroom, which he said has benefited him as much as the students by bringing in new ideas and activities that he might not have thought of.

Outside of the classroom, Berkheiser spends time working with students on SAE projects, coaching teams and working with students looking to earn different FFA degrees or aspiring to run for a state FFA office. He said he is always encouraging students to try out a contest.

"You have to love working with the FFA and students in the FFA — that's where the time comes in," he said.

The chapter is best known for its parliamentary procedure teams.

"It's rewarding to see kids develop self confidence and the ability to speak and think on their feet," Berkheiser said of working with parliamentary procedure teams.

Because of the investment he's made in students, Berkheiser has developed relationships with many families.

"It's like a lifelong friendship with them," he said.

As for the future of agriculture education, Berkheiser is confident.

"There are some passionate, talented people graduating," he said.

For anyone considering a career teaching agriculture, Berkheiser believes a foundation in FFA is very beneficial. It provides insight into how the extracurricular aspects of FFA benefits students.

As he heads into retirement, Berkheiser is looking forward to planning vacations during the school year. He also expects he will volunteer some time to help out with some FFA activities.

Grow, Lead, Succeed

Serving as a state FFA officer for a year is a challenging, albeit rewarding, experience. State officers of the Pennsylvania FFA Association travel the commonwealth promoting agriculture education and the FFA, and in doing that, get to meet some pretty amazing people. Many businesses and industries support the association, and state officers have the chance to meet the people behind these organizations to learn what they are all about. This opens up many ideas about what state officers plan on doing after their year of service is over, and some of them even change their major and career goals completely because of the businesses they get the chance to visit. Below, the Pennsylvania FFA Officers share what their plans are after their year of service and how the business visits have affected their future plans.

Casey Shawver — State President

My plans are to finish my degree at Penn State in agriculture science and get a job working in the business field after I retire in June. This year the visit to Farm Bureau taught me a lot. I never realized how much non-agriculture legislation is passed that directly affects farmer's daily lives, such as the inheritance tax, transportation regulations, and more. Those people are impacting agriculture positively in a different way. They are promoting agriculture to those who make legislation and to me that is a very important role. Farmers and agriculturalists need people in the Capitol and Washington D.C. to make sure legislation is being passed that is only beneficial.

Austin Albright — State Vice President

To be honest, these business visits opened my eyes to how large agriculture is. I have gained appreciation for these different sectors of agriculture, and want to continue to advocate for agricultural in general. I always knew agriculture was more than just cows, sows, and plows, but doing these tours and visits really open your eyes to what goes into the process of that company. It truly shows that without one person that company would not work as well or potentially fail. I plan to attend college majoring in agricultural business management, and agricultural systems management. I want to have my own business buying, selling, and repairing agricultural equipment. This year



Members of the Pennsylvania FFA Association at the State Leadership Conference.

serving as Pennsylvania state officer, I gained an experience I wouldn't want to miss. The opportunity to promote agriculture in Pennsylvania opens your eyes to new things. You meet so many people who potentially change your life, and something they say, or even of their comfort zone to run for

Shannon Copeland — State Secretary

My favorite business/industry was Range Resources because of the cellus Shale and Coalition visit. I absolutely loved when we visited one of the drilling sites. The industry visits have affected me because originally before I was a state FFA officer I planned on agribusiness but I didn't know now I do. These business visits have changed my life and opened up so much, and I cannot be an