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McNay Research Farm Youth Field Days

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Abstract

McNay youth field days were created out of a necessity for youth to have a clearer understanding of the role of production agriculture in their everyday lives and an increased awareness of cultural differences. This program fits with Iowa State University's mission by providing a high-quality educational experience that includes diversity education as well as providing opportunities of engagement for campus, commodity groups, and volunteers. Grants from multiple organizations and agencies have supported the majority of the costs of this program from start to finish.

Disciplines

Agricultural Science | Agriculture

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Sue Delaney
Monroe County extension director

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In the past four years, over 1,600 third grade students and over 160 teachers and volunteers participated in a high-quality, experiential learning field day that included rotations through stations featuring gardening, food preparation, nutrition, livestock, crops, and feeding the world. The unique and innovative field days were developed, implemented, and evaluated in partnership with staff from Iowa State University Extension, the Iowa State University McNay Research Farm, and local Farm Bureau groups. Funding was received from local Farm Bureaus in Lucas, Monroe, and Wayne Counties as well as a challenge grant from Iowa Farm Bureau. Additional funding was awarded from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the 4-H Foundation. The Department of Horticulture at Iowa State University provided plant materials and garden management information. Commodity groups, such as the Iowa Corn Growers Association, the Iowa Soybean Promotion Board, the Iowa Sheep Industry Association, and the Iowa Cattlemen's Association donated educational materials for the students to take home. Each year over 50 volunteers from Lucas, Monroe, and Wayne counties assisted with the stations

during the field days. Master Gardeners donated over 100 hours planting, maintaining, harvesting, and assisting with field days.

The objectives of the field days include:

- Developing and fostering an awareness of cultural differences in foods within our country.
- Creating an understanding of farming practices in the areas of horticulture, crops, and livestock production.
- Increasing knowledge about the food guide pyramid and food safety.
- Increasing the understanding of agriculture's role in food production.

Over 50% (171) of the 2002 evaluations were returned.

When students were asked to identify one product they learned about that was made from soybeans, 152 could identify a correct product. Of those who responded correctly, the items identified as soy products included: soy milk (114), soy chips (32), bacon bits (5), and crayons (1).

Students were asked to identify three plants in the Native American garden called "The Three Sisters." The students were given the choices of corn, carrots, tomatoes, beans, squash, and eggplant. The correct answer was corn, beans, and squash. The number of youth correctly responding to this question was 108. Although not entirely correct, 47 youth were able to identify two out of the three sisters correctly.

Students were asked to match the product with the source animal or plant. They were given the opportunity to show they had learned that jello is a product of beef, hand lotion a product of sheep, insulin a product of swine, ice cream a product of the dairy cow, ethanol a product of

corn, and crayons a product of soybeans. Eighty-eight youth could correctly match three or more of the by-products with the source plant or animal. Out of those 88, 73 youth could correctly match all six by-products with their corresponding plant or animal.

Youth were asked to identify one food they had never eaten before that they ate during the noon meal. Of the youth responding, one student said that everything eaten for lunch was a new experience. Other foods mentioned were: fry bread (88), corn bread (10), salad-rice/beans (10), grape tomatoes (8), and coleslaw (11).

One of the sessions the youth participated in was designed to teach them the definition of photosynthesis. Youth were asked the question: "When a plant takes sunlight, carbon dioxide, and water and turns it into sugar, it is called....." The response categories were electrolysis, photosynthesis, and osmosis. One hundred sixty-one youth correctly responded to the question.

Media coverage has been quite extensive. Through newspaper, radio and over five minutes of air time on KTVO-TV, this program has been quite widely publicized throughout the region.

The team work of county extension directors, field specialists, McNay staff, Master Gardeners, volunteers, and organizations coupled with creative excellence has helped establish ISU Extension as an agency with the ability to provide top quality and diverse programming.