



40th Annual Farm and Garden

FFA is a Game Changer for Villa Grove Students

By Sophia Wegeng

Agriculture provides not only an industry for many residents in Central Illinois, but also holds an integral place in the lives of some of our local youth. The Villa Grove FFA chapter, in its 4th year as a program, has become one of the most active programs in the community. Ms. Callie Parr has ignited a passion in some of the students for agriculture. The chapter, around 30 strong, consists of mainly high school students with a few jr. high intermixed. Of these students, 6 hold officer positions. These officers strive to inform, conduct, and plan activities for the membership. Most of these activities are structured in such a way as to fill certain slots of



Villa Grove FFA Chapter

annual pork chop supper. One major attribute gained from being in FFA is the skill of public speaking. These students have many opportunities to strengthen these skills. The

take place during the school year, but stays very active during the summer, too. Clayton Knierim, the farm operations officer, orchestrates and manages all of the chapter's dealings regarding the farm plots. He corresponds with farmers, businesses, and markets to make the chapter's yields as efficient and profitable as possible. With the sweet corn plot just behind the school, students actually get to experience the whole process from soil testing to selling the corn at Ag Days. Fundraising is an essential part of the chapter's mission. In order to implement projects like "Ag Field Day", an education program for the elementary students, the chapter needs to be able to fund themselves. Trips, like National Convention, State Convention, 212 Conference, and WLC provide members with a chance to witness other chapter's accomplishments and further their passion for agriculture, while deepening their own leadership and personal growth. These skills mixed with a blue coutury jacket provide a polished, more refined group of individuals who truly have a leg up on their peers.



Villa Grove FFA Chapter

the POA, or Program of Activities. The categories include "growing leaders, building communities, and strengthening agriculture". We compete within these categories at the state and national level, along with our chapter scrapbook. Community relationships are a huge part of the chapter's mission. The chapter conducts a Bridge clean-up twice a year, along with an appreciation breakfast, and donate thanksgiving food baskets to provide families with a meal. The chapter also assists clubs like the lion's club with their

officers, and featured members present at Rotary lunches, School board meetings, and freshman orientation. Members also compete against other chapters in CDE's or Career Developmental Events. The chapter competes in Parliamentary Procedure, Forestry, Livestock Judging, and Public Speaking. The junior high team participated in the "Conduct of Chapters" competition, a modified version of the Parliamentary Procedure competition, and will compete at state along with the Livestock Judging team. FFA does not just

Bozdech Farms cont'd from pg 1

1971, when my uncle died in a house fire. That was the original Bozdech Brothers farm, so maybe we'll get back to that, we'll see.

Being a family operation probably presents some unique challenges, doesn't it?

Yes it does. <grins> You know how it is when you're growing up and you think you know everything and you get a little hard headed about it. Sometimes you have let them make their own mistakes, and then after you weld it back together you say, "see, I told you that wasn't going to work." It's fun though. It's an interesting dynamic. We sure do get to spend a lot of time together and that's the fun part. Of the two boys, Gage is more on the crop side, and Case loves cattle. He's always enjoying showing cattle and working with them. The main place Gage likes cows is on his plate! <chuckles> They're good. They're learning. It takes time to get better at it.

Amanda is a farm girl, too? Oh yeah. She grew up raising hogs, corn and soy beans. She showed a lot of pigs with her dad. She enjoys the livestock part, also.

There's not a lot of people raising hogs any more, is there?

No there's not. It's all the big production farms, now. She talks about when she was showing pigs at the Arthur fair, one barn wouldn't be enough to hold them, but now you go down there and there's maybe twenty pens, at the most.

Is this a product of the larger operations running the smaller producers out, or did the cost get to be too much?

Costs increased, but it really started when the smaller meat lockers started going out of business. The larger meat supply to keep their labor force going, so they didn't want to buy from one hundred and twenty guys, they want to buy

from ten.

Is there anything you would like to add? Anything I've missed?

I think there's going to be some real opportunities for guys that are Case and Gage's age. They'll just have to keep their head above water. We hired Farm Financial Analyst Paull Freebairn to help with our accounting, and it really opened my eyes. It's something that you really need to be on top of. I always knew record keeping was one of my weak points, but you can hire an expert to do it, so why not? I never did like the book keeping part of it.

Let's talk about the different agreements that farmers have with land owners, for those, like me, who don't really understand all of this. When you cash rent, you're paying a certain amount to the land owner and everything else is yours. You're responsible for all the costs of production, and then you make whatever is left over after harvest?

Yes. Most of my landlords get a check in the spring and one in the fall, and the only check they'll have to write is their property tax.

There are also agreements where the land owner pays all the overhead and then pays you to farm the ground, right?

Correct. What's gotten popular over the last few years is a flex cash rent lease, where you have a certain base where you know you're going to pay that, and the land owner knows they're going to make that as a minimum, and then if you have a really good year yield-wise you can run it through a formula and sometimes the land owner can get a bonus. I think that's the most fair way to do it. We do have some fifty/fifty farms where the landlord pays half the bills and gets half the crop.

Is that common?

It's getting to be less and

less common. As generations get more and more removed from the farm, they don't know anything about the production process, and frankly they don't want the hassle, so they just cash rent it. They don't have the time, inclination or skills to oversee it, so they're happy to pay someone to do it.

How about specialty crops? The crops like Miscanthus and marijuana? <laughing>

There might be some opportunities with hemp, especially if they get into paper production with it because it produces so much more, so much faster than a tree.

Eric Rund has a company that will go around and seed Miscanthus for you. It doesn't propagate by seed, it only propagates by root, so you have to dig up the roots and chop them into two inch pieces. I saw something at the University of Illinois once that said if we put all the conservation grass lands into switch grass or Miscanthus, they could produce enough electricity for the state of Illinois. It seems to me that it would be a good way to go. They use a silage chopper to harvest it, usually in February or March when the ground is still frozen.

One final question for you. What do you do when you're not in the fields, during the "off-season"?

We need to get the machinery ready to go, and of course with livestock there's really no down time. A lot of times in the winter, we're not required to do continuing education, but if you want to keep up, that's the time to do it. There's a lot of information floating around. You look at a lot of test plot data and try to see what's going to work next year. It's funny, because we can do everything right and we'll maybe influence thirty percent of the outcome. Mother nature is definitely in charge and she makes the final determination!

Heritage FFA Having An Eventful Year

By Lynnae Struck and Historian Rianna Rothermel. This year has been a very eventful year for the Heritage FFA Chapter.

The Chapter consists of 53 members and 10 officers. Members have participated in many different CDE's including Section 17 Agronomy, State Agronomy, Forestry and Land Use. Individuals from the Chapter also participated in the Section 17 Public Speaking LDE. Secretary, Jada Davis earned 2nd place in the Prepared Public Speaking Contest. The Heritage FFA Chapter also participated in FFA Week with dress up days and games. Members were able to drive their tractors to school, compete in Agriculture Olympics, a Scavenger Hunt and many other activities throughout the week. At the end of the week, the Officer Team held an Appreciation Breakfast for the local farmers and their families.

The Chapter also helped at Jim Downs' Farm Sale in November. The Officers served breakfast and lunch to farmers and community members the day of the sale. The Chapter



Heritage FFA Chapter

will be hosting their Annual Banquet in April at Heritage High School. Awards will be given, Donors will be recognized, and the 2019-2020 Officer team will be installed. For the past month, Horticulture students have been working very hard to plant the flowers and plants that will be sold at the Annual Plant Sale in May. If you would like to support the Heritage FFA Chapter, the Plant Sale will take place on May 3rd & 4th in front of the Bakery in Homer, IL.

On March 28, 2019 the Heritage FFA Chapter and Heritage FCCLA went to Autumn Fields

for their annual Community Service Trip. The students helped outside, they cleaned, met with the residents, and played games with them. After helping at Autumn Fields in Savoy, the students went to The Caring Place to help with landscaping projects. Heritage FFA is so grateful that they could use this time to give back to their community.

If you would like to learn more about the Heritage FFA Chapter or receive their monthly newsletter please contact Brooke Mohr at brooke.mohr@heritage8.org or call (217) 834-3392.

Unity FFA Petting Zoo

Members from the Unity FFA Chapter are currently planning the annual petting zoo, which allows kids in the community to take a closer look into agriculture. The kids get the opportunity to learn about agriculture, including animals, machinery, and safety. This event takes a lot of planning, so every Wednesday the chapter has committee meetings where students get together and discuss every detail of the event. In addition, the students also work and plan the event outside of these meetings.

When coming time to plan this year's event, members discussed the previous petting zoos as well as any new ideas they may have. One main thing our chapter thought about was all the parts that went well from the previous petting zoos. At the petting zoo last year, Pre-K through 2nd grade students from the Unit 7 School District were invited to come explore. In addition, a rotation was set up in the afternoon for 5th grade students to learn and have fun. The rotation included time to pet the animals, climb on machinery, play games, and learn about corn production along with grain bin safety. Since the kids enjoyed everything from last year, it was decided to do something very similar again this year.

Another big topic the chapter discusses is all of the animals and machinery students can bring. This year, members are bringing horses, chickens, lambs, goats, miniature donkeys, pigs, rabbits, and a calf. Each student bringing an animal will create a poster about their animal. When the children look at the poster, they will be able to see pictures and read interesting facts about that animal. For machinery this year, students are bringing a variety of tractors, old and new. Just as students who are bringing animals, the students bringing machinery are making posters with pictures and simple information on their equipment for the children to learn from. Many kids get super excited when they pet animals and climb on the machinery, especially



Unity FFA Chapter

when they don't have that experience at home.

The petting zoo is scheduled for Wednesday, April 10th from 8:45 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. It will be open to Pre-K through 2nd grade students. The Unity FFA Chapter is ex-

cited to put on this fun event for Unit Seven Schools and daycares to see the children smile and have fun while learning about and exploring agriculture.

We Are Ready for the 2019 Ice Cream Season!



Sidney Dairy Barn

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