

Farm to table helps youth increase their knowledge about agriculture

AT A GLANCE

Kootenai County youth learn about commodities and resources that are important for Idaho agriculture.

The Situation

According to the National Center for Agricultural Literacy, by 2050, the world's population will reach nearly 10 billion people, requiring agriculture production to double. It is imperative that youth and adults recognize the critical role agriculture plays in our daily lives. With the continued population shift from rural agricultural environments to suburban and urban environments, the population in Idaho is becoming further removed from food sources. It is important that youth and adults are aware of how their food goes from the field to their table.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension partners with Farm Bureau's Farm to Table to provide Idaho youth with experiences to increase awareness of how Idaho crops are produced in a safe and responsible manner. Through events like Farm to Table, University of Idaho Extension aims to instill the value of agricultural literacy on young people within the state of Idaho. University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development, Extension educators and volunteers work annually with Farm Bureau's Promotion and Education Committee to plan and implement quality and measurable programming that focuses on education, exploration and hands-on



A local fifth grader participates in Farm to Table sugar beet activity.

activities. The objective of Farm to Table is to help youth better understand the origins of their food, responsible agricultural practices, and resources used for sustainable food production. Over 2,000 Kootenai County fifth graders participate in the week-long event. Youth use critical thinking skills during sessions that help them apply what they learn about agricultural situations.

Program Outcomes

Matt Fisher, 4-H area Extension educator in agriculture and STEM conducted a sugar beet bubble activity testing the elasticity of bubble solution when sugar is added. Students noted when adding sugar, the bubble solution was stronger and the bubbles were bigger, lasted longer, and were less prone to breaking than

with just bubble solution alone. This activity mimicked the addition of glycerin to certain soil conditioners to increase absorption into the soil to help crops grow better. Fifth graders also learned how sugar beets are an important Idaho crop and the process of turning sugar beets into sugar. Sugar beets were of interest since sugar beets are not grown in north Idaho.

Jim Ekins, area water Extension educator, and Extension Water Outreach provided a water cycle learning activity. This peer reviewed Project WET (Water Education for Teachers) activity had youth act as water drops in the water cycle. They moved among nine stations that represented places on Earth where water is found (oceans, clouds, glaciers, rivers, lakes, animals, plants, soil, groundwater). Participants rolled large cardboard dice to direct them to the next station, or to stay where they are. Beads on a chenille (pipe cleaner) helped them map out their journey. Additionally, youth got a colorful bracelet to wear home to remind them of the activity. Objectives include that youth will describe the movement of water within the water cycle and identify the states of water as it does so. At the conclusion of the activity, youth engaged in a structured reflection activity describing where in the cycle they got “stuck” and why water tend to stay in some places longer than others. Since water is needed to grow the crops we eat, and water is scarcer in Idaho, it

is important that youth learn where their water comes from and how to best manage it for beneficial uses.

To evaluate the impact on participants of Farm to Table, a Likert exit survey determined that:

- 96% of youth stated that Farm to Table sessions helped them better understand how their food is grown.
- 97% of participants could explain how agriculture is important in their lives.
- 92% of youth could explain resources needed to grow crops in Idaho.

Some comments about Farm to Table:

- “I liked going to the different stations and learning about what’s grown in Idaho, like apples and corn.”
- The activities are fun. I never knew how much water crops need to grow.”
- “I knew about potatoes and wheat, but not other crops.”

The Future

With Farm to Table educating Kootenai County youth for over a decade, Farm Bureau and University of Idaho Extension will continue to make youth aware of the importance of agriculture in their daily lives.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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