

Agriculture education shared with elementary students in Oneida County

AT A GLANCE

Field days with the Malad Elementary and Stone Elementary schools have allowed youth in K-5th grades to learn more about agriculture in their community and about its importance in Idaho.

The Situation

With fewer families being involved in production agriculture, youth are not as exposed to agriculture topics as previous generations. In Malad, the transition in school leadership and the COVID pandemic caused some previous ag education programs to cease. This left youth without a reliable source from which to gain information about agriculture in their local community, their state and the world. Idaho has the fifth largest state agriculture economy according to a recent ISDA bulletin. Idaho ranks first in the nation in the production of potatoes, barley, peppermint oil, alfalfa hay and trout. The State is also third in the nation for milk and dairy products. These high rankings highlight the importance of agriculture in Idaho and the need to show our youth how important these operations are in their community.

Our Response

In 2023, the director of the Oneida County Soil & Water Conservation District approached the University of Idaho Extension office about providing some ag education in elementary schools. A team was formed between these two organizations and the local FFA chapter to develop a field day for local elementary school



4-H volunteers and FFA students combine efforts to teach elementary school students about agriculture.

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This team met each January to plan what topics would be taught that year in addition to planning any other logistics. Each Ag Day was held during the first week of May at the Oneida County Event Center. The state theme/topic for the Oneida County Soil & Water Conservation District was used as an overall theme for our own field days. In 2023 it was “One Water” based on water quality. In 2024 it was “May the forest be with you always” and in 2025 it was “Home is where the habitat is.”

Six individual and unique stations were created each year for elementary students to rotate through in 20-minute intervals. Once topics were finalized, the local

FFA officer team and other FFA members would choose topics they would like to teach. They would then prepare posters, lesson plans and any other objects necessary for their short presentation. These teenagers completed most of the teaching with the help and supervision of the planning committee.

Program Outcomes

The past three years have seen a huge success in this new elementary Ag Day. The school superintendent and both elementary school principals have commented that this event is one they look forward to having each year. Teachers were surveyed in 2023 and 2024. All who responded really liked the time of year and the location at which the Ag Day was held. Every teacher who responded also enjoyed the variety and quality of topics chosen for the stations. Ninety percent of teachers thought that the professionalism of the station presenters exceeded expectations.

Teachers were also allowed to provide feedback during these surveys. Some of these comments included “The presenters were great. We love how quickly we moved from station to station,” “It was well timed, and the kiddos got a lot of things which makes them excited. I like how the students got to make something at almost every station,” and “I love FFA and 4H and love getting to introduce the students to it (agriculture) this way!”

Other pieces of constructive criticism were also provided as to the timing of some stations, the preparation of the FFA officers, teaching to a younger audience and having presenters speak louder. Many teachers also suggested station topics that we have used in subsequent years.

During each of the three years (2023-2025), nearly 400 students attended this Ag Day. Before returning to the school, students were surveyed about their experience. All students responded that they enjoyed their time learning about local agriculture. Roughly 80% of students also responded that they had learned something new within one of the stations they participated in.

The Future

The Malad Elementary Ag Day has proven to be a fun and interactive way for youth to learn about and become more comfortable with agriculture around them. It has now become part of the regular schedule and will continue to be implemented for many years to come. The teamwork between the University of Idaho Extension office, the Oneida County Soil & Water Conservation District and the FFA chapter has created many valuable connections and educational opportunities that are continuing to benefit the community in more ways than just this.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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