LOOKING FORWARD, GIVING BACK

November 19, 2018

To Whom It May Concern;

Providing a **brief** letter of support is a daunting task when the request is from Mr. Greg Schneider. The impact the Ag program at Greensburg Community High School is having on our students and our community is beyond what a simple letter can share. Under his leadership, the entire Ag program has made enormous strides. His involvement with students is amazing and the results are making a difference in our community. Students are engaged and motivated because they are doing hands-on work and can see the difference they have the power to make.

The Decatur County Community Foundation partners with all of the local schools to help in a variety of ways. We have been so impressed with the innovative ideas that have been coming out of the GCHS Ag Department. Ideas that are phenomenal in their simplicity. Being asked to fund an incubator for a program that raises turkeys that will eventually provide meals at the local soup kitchen is just a win-win for our donors. To see their donations put to work actually helping alleviate hunger while also educating young agricultural students really resonates with donors.

That same incubator was loaned to a preschool so they could see the eggs hatch. What a brilliant way to share resources and spark an interest in young minds. The rigging of "Egg Cam" was exciting and we shared the school's link with our Facebook friends and on our website. Again, our grant dollars were seen in action. When Mr. Schneider heard that a local elementary had requested a grant for raised bed gardening, he had his students help construct the gardens and then offer their expertise on soil types and what plantings would thrive. Again, learning by doing and also filling a need in the community is just the perfect way to work together to achieve. Older students mentoring younger students is another value-added component of the Ag program's interactions with the community.

This Ag program shows students that a wide variety of occupations are available in the ag arena. Parents appreciate when opportunities exist locally that may keep their children a little closer to home. The apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities provide the chance for students to find their strengths before heading to college and paying for courses that may cost them time and money and not provide anything in return.

Decatur County Community Foundation | 101 East Main Street | Greensburg, IN 47240
Phone: 812-662-6364 | Fax: 812-662-8704 | DCCFound.org

The Community Foundation finds enormous value in having a good working relationship with Mr. Schneider and the GCHS Ag program and we do not hesitate to reach out if we feel that he and his students could possibly partner with other projects in the community.

I could go on for pages about how happy we are to see the Ag program flourishing and to know that our local students are being provided with ample opportunities to explore ag-related interests and occupations. If you would like further discussion, we would be happy to answer any questions you might have about their program.

Sincerely,

Tami D. Wenning, Executive Director
Decatur County Community Foundation

LOWE'S
PELLETS & GRAIN

2372 W. STATE ROAD 46
GREENSBURG, IN 47240
(812) 663-7863

November 19, 2018,

RE: Letter of Recommendation for Greensburg Agricultural Education Department

Dear Selection Committee:

I am writing on behalf of and in support of Greensburg's Agricultural Education Department as they seek the Excellence in Action award for superior CTE program. As the owner of Lowe's Pellets & Grain, Incorporated, a livestock feed manufacturing company and grain elevator located in Decatur County, I recognize the significance of the agriculture industry for the economic development of our community, as well as the role production agriculture plays. For the past 5 years, Lowe's has been a business partner with Greensburg's Ag program, and I have had the opportunity to serve on the Ag Advisory Council. During that time, I have witnessed the tremendous growth of the program under the direction of Mr. Greg Schneider, AgriScience teacher.

Greg has a remarkable ability to connect with other local leaders in our industry and tap in to the knowledge and resources they have to offer. He is ever-mindful of the program's curriculum and how to best make it meet the needs of our industry at large. On several occasions, Greg has brought various classes to our facility to tour a working feed mill and grain elevator, so that his students can learn about the various aspects of a business such as ours. Topics such as animal nutrition (formulating rations), grain marketing, operational challenges (warehouse management, employee training and retention), marketing and regulatory requirements (FSMA) have all been incorporated into these meetings with his students. Greg is highly successful at demonstrating to his students the "real world application" of the curriculum. As a result, he has seen more students take interest in his classes and the ag program.

Greg has also taken the initiative to help students with Work Based Learning (WBL) opportunities. His relationship with various agriculture companies in our area has made him aware of the needs of these industry representatives. That, in conjunction with his connection to students choosing to pursue a career in industry, allows him to properly evaluate skill sets and match students to a WBL experience that will prove beneficial to their future endeavors. In the recent past, Lowe's has had the opportunity to be a part of a WBL experience, and I have witnessed the growth of the students involved.

The growth of Greensburg's Agriculture Education Program and the ability it has had at connecting with local agriculture industry is what has generated its success, to the benefit of the students, as well as the companies involved. I would not hesitate in choosing this program as recipient of your Excellence in Action Award.

If I can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Kristy Lowe
Owner
Lowe's Pellets & Grain, Inc.
klowe@lowespellets.com
(812) 593-2502

Cultivating Careers through Work Based Learning
By Greg Schneider
Appeared in Agricultural Education Magazine, Nov- Dec, 2017

There is a fine line between being in a groove and being in a rut. Whenever I find my teaching leaning towards the latter, I look for new ways to invigorate my passion. Recently, I found a new passion in work based learning (WBL). WBL is an experience in which students meet real world challenges in an actual work place setting within their chosen career path, usually for high school credit, and can be a paid or volunteer experience.

WBL is good for the agricultural industry. By creating a pool of qualified candidates that have a verified list of skills, we are keeping our agricultural industries strong and growing. WBL is good for the local community. The vitality of youth keeps a community progressive. By inspiring our young people to return to live and work in our community, our community remains vibrant. Most importantly, WBL is good for students. It gives students the opportunity to explore career options before investing in post-secondary education and also gives them a skill set and experiences that will facilitate premier leadership, personal growth and career success.

I teach at Greensburg Community High School in the heartland of Indiana. The vast majority of our school's 700 students come from a non-agriculture background. Production agriculture in Decatur County is a major contributor to the local and state economy. Greensburg, with a population of 12,000 residents, is headquarters to several small to mid-sized agricultural companies that serve production agriculture in the tri-state area. We are in grain country - soybeans and corn are big business. Modern pork production is also a mainstay with a large dairy and scattering of beef cattle finishing operations and small scale livestock producers as well.

Developing the Future of Agriculture

I believe the future of agriculture hinges on students that do not come from an agricultural background. My number one goal as an agriculture teacher is to inspire these students to consider the wealth of possible career fields that support production agriculture. Within our immediate community, students can secure employment as service technicians, agriculture salespeople, agronomists, equipment operators, and animal health and nutrition specialists, among others. The list of opportunities literally goes on and on.

I have always worked to actively engage my program with the local community and agriculture industry visits are a regular use of my extended contract. This past spring, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) offered a summer program called "Teachers in Industry".

This program provides teachers with a paid internship in a local company for up to 100 hours to learn more about that particular facet of industry. I saw this program as a golden opportunity to learn more about the agricultural industries that support the local economy so I could better tailor my curriculum to prepare students to enter the workforce right after graduation after their post-secondary education.

After securing permission from IDOE to deviate slightly from the program of spending 100 hours at one location, I instead spent 8-10 hours at as may different agriculture related jobs as I could arrange. My primary goal was to establish five agricultural industry internships within the 7-week summer break and learn the skills needed by the employers. My secondary goal was to secure agreements for future student job placement opportunities. I found very willing partners in our local agriculture industry. As a matter of fact, I ran out of time, before I ran out of opportunities.

From Industry Experience to Work Based Learning

For WBL to be truly successful, it should be part of a declared career pathway. IDOE required that I create a student training plan for each location I shadowed. In this plan, I identified agriculture course standards that would be addressed in the different career fields and skills required successful participation in those careers. I also created a four year plan of courses a student would take to prepare for each career. In our school, WBL internships are offered to upperclassmen. I don't want my students entering an internship without some background information and a bank of knowledge. I discovered I also don't want to limit this background to just agriculture classes. For example, public speaking and basic computer skills were identified by employers as universal needs, more advanced computer programming classes are helpful for jobs involving technology, and biology and chemistry courses are helpful in many jobs that involve crop and/or animal science.

Each training plan also includes the cadre of related FFA career development events and experiences that would help prepare a student for a given career field. When properly used in conjunction with classroom instruction, opportunities through active participation in FFA activities are meaningful proving grounds for preparing students for career success. My goal for each student is to create a powerful resume that will place the student on the top of a job candidate list. In addition to technical skills, I also work to provide the students with experiences that help them develop interpersonal skills so they can convey their knowledge in an interview. Employers want to hire candidates with people skills that can communicate effectively and engage with the public. They want to see a good first impression. Every time. They want an employee with a work ethic that is a self-starter and a productive worker.

Employers recognized that the key to creating long-term employees that are dedicated to the company and the community is to hire from *within the community*. Employers can recruit qualified graduates from other outside programs that will fill the employment needs, but if the employees are from another community, they will generally leave to return to their home community. This translates into lost time and money invested in employee training. As the agriculture teacher, it is my responsibility to prepare our students for these career opportunities and support our local agricultural industry.

My "Teachers in Industry" experience resulted in a new agriculture internship course being developed for our students. First, during the summer after the junior year of high school, students participate in a paid internship program. We have several local agriculture industries and farming operations that agreed to host students for two-week intervals for a total of four placements over an 8-week period. The idea is for the student to experience a variety of agricultural career fields. All employers understand that in this two week period, the student will not become an effective employee, but rather, the purpose for this time is for students to explore different agriculture careers. The following senior year is when the student will declare an interest and enter into a dedicated WBL internship with the company of their choice. This course is for high school credit, with release time from school as well as the opportunity to work after school and weekend hours. While the cost of the paid summer employment is supplemented by our local Community Foundation, the full cost of the dedicated school year WBL is covered by the respective employers. During this time, the students hone their skills and become valued employees. A student training plan is written and follows the student throughout the experience. A mentor is assigned to the student by the host site, and as the agriculture teacher, I conduct regularly scheduled job site supervision visits.

Stumbling Blocks

Even in a perfect scenario, there are roadblocks and challenges. The most prevalent one we have found is age restrictions on equipment operation. Many companies require employees be 18 years old to operate equipment. In some cases, employees have to be 18 years old to be hired. We discovered an educational clause in the labor laws here in Indiana that will allow some exemptions, but even with this information, it requires an industry partner that sees the value of figuring out how to make things work. In most cases, these concerns can be mitigated through student mentorship and effective supervision. It is also important for the employer to feel like there is communication and support coming from the school. Establishing and maintaining relationships between industry and the WBL supervisor is paramount.

I believe in the future of agriculture and I am confident that by providing experiences through WBL, we are insuring a bright future as the next generation of agriculturalists take on the challenge of feeding the world. Based on my experiences, I offer the following five steps to creating a successful WBL internship program:

1. Establish relationships with industry partners.
2. Identify local employment needs & align with program course offerings.
3. Access resources and create a state approved curriculum.
4. Match proper mentor/mentee partnerships.
5. Maintain job site supervision and support.

I am proud that agricultural education can play such an active part in preparing the future workforce for our industry. If you find yourself in a rut, perhaps a WBL program will help you get your groove back!

Author:
Greg Schneider
Agriculture Teacher - Greensburg Community High School

Living to Serve

By Greg Schneider

Appeared Agricultural Education Magazine, Jan-Feb 2018

We are agriculture teachers by choice and not by chance. We reaffirm this statement everyday as we continually look for innovative ways to engage our students - both in and outside of the classroom. I've been teaching 26 years. In that time, I have tried to make sure it was never the same year twice. In the interest of full disclosure, I cannot say I have always been successful. When the work-life pendulum swings, you sometimes just have no choice but to follow the momentum. The birth of a child, restoring a house, acquiring a neglected farm...all life events that place demands on time outside of the school day.

And so we continually seeking that elusive, harmonious balance between work and family. How can we provide for our school and community, while trying our best to keep these efforts confined to a 10 hour day? Project-based instruction has always been a focal point of many of my classes, but after 22 years of teaching, I stumbled on to a strategy that most of the time helps, and only occasionally hinders. That teaching strategy is (cue drum roll)...service learning.

Some 20 years ago, I was at one of my first Agriculture Teacher inservice trainings as an aspiring young teacher. An older, experienced teacher was speaking on what makes a successful agriculture program and FFA chapter. I distinctly remember him saying, "It doesn't matter how many trophies your FFA chapter wins or how many plaques you have hanging on your classroom wall; if you want your community to truly support your program, figure out how your program can support your community."

Over the years, I have never forgotten that sage advice and I have taken it to heart as I develop hands-on learning experiences in each class I teach. I search for ways to combine my curricular standards and course objectives with opportunities for my students to engage in meaningful service learning activities that will also meet community needs.

Greensburg Community High School is a "city school". While the City of Greensburg is surrounded by a strong and progressive agricultural community, 90% of my students come from a non-agricultural background. We are on an alternating block schedule. As such, I teach on a 90 minute class period. Our geographically central location in the city and county puts us within 10 minutes of most potential projects. The extended class period gives us ample time to travel to off-campus locations. Service Learning opportunities abound and connections can be made to just about any agriculture course.

Landscape students hone their maintenance and installation skills by helping out at our county park system. Students maintain plant beds, prune trees and perform other various tasks as needed. We also perform landscape work around our courthouse and the town square. Landscape students wear Hi-Vis vests for safety reasons, but it also makes us more visible in the community - we receive a lot of positive feedback from people that see the difference students are making. And, of course, there is nothing like having your students seen working outside around the school campus on a beautiful spring afternoon to serve a recruitment tool for the agriculture program.

Natural Resource Management students maintain public use hiking trails and also work to help manage the 17-acre lake and the native and non-native waterfowl populations at one of our county parks. Students perform a valuable services by enabling the paid Parks & Recreation staff to focus attention where needed. We also partner with our State Department of Natural Resources in performing Best Management Practices at a state managed Wildlife Area that is close to the school. Students work alongside industry professionals while learning new skills and exploring career opportunities. By engaging with outside partners, students have opportunities and firsthand experiences I would never be able to provide on my own in the classroom.

Horticulture students visit local assisted living centers to take care of plants and engage with the elderly residents. While students are learning about plant care, they are also learning professional skills and developing an appreciation for cross-generational knowledge.

Horticulture students also maintain our school garden. Vegetables are raised for student use in our FACS dept.. The summer harvest goes to local food pantries. We are currently looking at ways to expand our vegetable production to include produce raised for our school cafeteria salad bar as part of a Farm-to-School initiative.

AgriBusiness students created a marketing strategy to help promote local agriculture and increase the agricultural literacy of community members, the vast majority of which come from a non-farm background. By creating a more "Ag Friendly" community, we hope to attract more agriculture industry to our area and thus strengthen our local economy. We are currently in the process of finalizing plans to build a school farm on our campus. AgriBusiness students also took the lead in researching and creating business plans for various farm enterprises that we can implement on the school farm to make the operation economically sustainable. All proposals had to meet the following criteria: generate income, engage at least one agriculture class in the learning process and promote local agriculture. Business plans were presented in a Shark Tank fashion to school corporation administrators, school board members and local agribusiness people.

Animal Science students play a huge role in addressing local food insecurity through our "Community Livestock Projects". In a partnership with a neighboring agriculture program, students raise dairy beef steers on a local farm close to school. On the same farm we also raise groups of six hogs. Young animals are donated to the project by local farmers. Two local feed mills provide feed and the students provide the labor. The animals reach market size, they are taken to a processor. The cost of processing is covered by another state organization. Students are learning how to raise livestock and understand how food is produced, the community has a reliable source of meat protein for food pantries and agriculture is placed at the forefront as a sustainable solution to local food insecurity. It is an amazing example of the synergy among our agricultural community, agriculture students included.

In order to provide students with the flexibility to align their own personal passions with a community need, we created Capstone Service. Juniors and Seniors customize their own individual service project. Students learn to identify and engage with community partners, locate and leverage resources and successfully implement a plan of action. Students enroll in this course as an independent study, but also have the opportunity to collaborate with their peers as they work through identified challenges.

Resources for implementing service learning are available through the National FFA Organization's Living to Serve program (https://www.ffa.org/livingtoserve). Online resources and a dedicated and friendly staff are available to provide anything from the logistics of how to plan an event and set SMART goals to an ever growing portfolio of ideas to grant funding to help make it all possible. Each state has a network of Ag Ed consultants and specialists that can assist in this endeavor as well. However, your greatest allies will be found at the local level.

Reach out! You will find partners in areas you never expected. And once your agriculture program builds momentum and a reputation of service, you will find securing partnerships and funding becomes even more fluid.

Service learning can be a valued educational component of the courses offered through any Agriculture Education Department. By integrating these activities into the existing course learning objectives, everyone wins. The community has important needs met; the teacher has meaningful activities that strengthen the agriculture program by improving positive interactions with the community; your family wins because most of these activities take place during the instructional day and the students have learning experiences that make a positive difference in their community and access to experiences that will influence them for the rest of their lives.. By allowing students an opportunity to invest themselves personally in the learning process, they take pride and ownership in their community. This personal investment in turn lays the groundwork for students to become active and invested community members for the rest of their lives.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb, "Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I will understand" Service Learning opportunities do not come in a neat, three ring binder. They are often dirty and messy. They are sometimes covered in tears and disappointment, but there is also ample quantities of pride, joy and immense satisfaction. All of these emotions – good and bad - are hallmarks of personal investment. When students invest themselves personally, they are active learners. They are engaged and they are thinking. They are developing skills that they will remember and use for the rest of their lives.

While it does require more effort, from my perspective as an agriculture teacher, these examples are the true merits of service learning. Good trade.

Author:
Greg Schneider
Agriculture Teacher - Greensburg Community High School

Ag Moves To The Head Of The Class

Greg Schneider
Progressive Farmer Magazine, October, 2014

In my chosen profession, I talk about agriculture every day. I teach "Ag."

I entered college to become an agriculture teacher in the mid-'80s. If you'll remember, agriculture was just pulling out of a devastating tailspin. Small and mid-sized farms were disappearing, and even the larger farms were succumbing to debt. As a result, agricultural education entered a process of redefining itself in order to stay current. This meant classes such as landscaping and natural resources were replacing what we thought of as traditional agriculture classes. These changes kept agriculture programs viable, and they filled a need. In doing so, however, a pathway was obscured.

It's been 23 years since I first entered the classroom. In the last few years, I've been pleased to see that production agriculture is making a resurgence to the mainstream. There is a growing national movement of people looking for ways to reconnect with their food supply, and, by association, they learn about farming and farmers.

Whether this new awareness is a blessing or a curse depends on how we in agriculture respond. We need to use this newfound attention to our advantage. The same spotlight that places us under scrutiny also gives us an effective platform to educate, and we need to grab it.

As small and mid-sized farm numbers continue to dwindle, there are fewer and fewer young people who come into direct contact with agriculture. Add to this the fact that the average age of the American farmer is steadily increasing, and the world's population is predicted to be 9 billion people by 2050, and we have some pretty grave concerns.

It's critical that we be more proactive in exposing young people to the career opportunities involved in agriculture today, not just as replacements for retiring farmers but to fill positions in numerous support services, such as research and animal health care.

There's an Amish adage: "Embrace enough technology to make your life easier but not so much that you don't need to ask your neighbor for help." As I have turned my teaching back toward production agriculture and educating my students and community as to the origins of food, I have not been alone. I've found tremendous support from the local, state and national agricultural communities.

There is a positive momentum in this country, and I want to see us continue to work together to educate everyone on the incredible contributions agriculture makes to this nation and the world. Now more than ever, it's time to start speaking up for agriculture.

Five in Five
In the next five years, Greg Schneider would like to see:
1. Agricultural literacy programs commonplace in schools.
2. More young people actively pursuing careers in production agriculture and related services.
3. Resurgence in small and mid-sized farms to act as an incubator for new agriculturalists.
4. People empowered with the knowledge of how to raise their own food.
5. Local and sustainable sources of fresh, nutritious food for food banks.

Indiana Farm-to-School:
An Agriculture Teacher's Perspective

Appeared in Indiana Farm to School Newsletter, 2014

I have to be honest, as a teacher, the Indiana Farm-to-School (F2S) initiative excites me. What I like most about F2S is that it has many facets. A school nutritionist looks at F2S as an opportunity to talk about making healthy eating choices. A local farmer may see it as an avenue to expand into another market. In my chosen profession, I talk about agriculture every day. My name is Greg Schneider and I teach high school "Ag". What I like most about F2S is that it serves as a platform to educate young people about agriculture and how food makes it from the farm to the table.

From a curricular standpoint, Farm-to-School showcases the interdisciplinary nature of my preferred subject area. Agriculture was the very first science. By studying the rhythms of nature, our early ancestors were able to mimic what they observed and started raising their own food instead of following it. If Social Studies interests you, the aforementioned development in turn enabled these neophyte farmers to hang up their nomadic walking shoes and concentrate on developing civilizations. Math? Two yaks plus three yaks is five yaks. Who knew? Who cared? ...before the dawn of early agriculture, that is. Math and the Ancient Art of Yak Reproduction eventually led to business development, which in turn led to the monetary system. Language arts? The medieval Saxons and the Normans had to come up with words of for all these food items we were producing. Have you ever wondered why we raise "hogs", but eat "pork"? Little known fact #37: the very first question ever asked was, "Who left the gate open?" Expletives were invented shortly thereafter. We can tie just about everything we learn in school to agriculture. I kind of like to think of my agrarian subject area as the mortar that holds the bricks of academia together...but that may just be me.

I'm assuming by now I have you hooked, so I am going to let you in on a little secret. Almost every county in Indiana has a school corporation with an agriculture program and accompanying agriculture teacher. As a general rule, we're affable individuals who are ready, willing and able to assist. Not only can we serve as a resource for F2S ideas and materials, but also we can act as a liaison to the greater agricultural community. Case in point: Did you know a 40 ft. draper head on a John Deere Combine is exactly 38 kindergarteners long? And you can fit five of those same kindergartners in the monstrous wheel rim of said Combine. This meaningful data was collected during a joint venture between our agricultural mechanics class, two kindergarten classes and our local John Deere dealer. (Parental Footnote: The Combine was stationary at all times during data collection). Our Animal Science classes assist elementary classes in hatching eggs and provide hands-on animal experiences to visiting grade levels. We've even arranged for agricultural engineers to talk to Project Lead the Way students. Agriculture teachers are an innovative bunch and, just like the government, we're here to help.

There are many facets to Indiana's Farm-to-School initiative. For my part, facilitating a farm-to-table connection with what goes into producing food is a vital and rewarding component. Where these exciting classroom partnerships can go is truly limited only by our imaginations. So, the next time your students roll their eyes and ask, "When are we going to use this in our real life?" you just send them my way. I'd love to talk with them about agriculture. And that's why the Indiana Farm-to-School initiative excites me.