

Fun on the Farm | www.elizabethton.com

Painting pumpkins, hunting for toy animals in a haystack and making seed necklaces are just a few of the activities students from Unaka Elementary participated in at the Drop Collaborative Farm on Thursday.

Unaka High School students in Future Farmers of America and Supervised Agricultural Experience sponsored the event to give children an opportunity to have fun on a farm.

“This allows kids to see what farming is all about and to learn where their food comes from,” said SEA instructor Josh Armentrout.

Aside from seeing the harvested garden, livestock and fish pond, kids enjoyed a picnic lunch, playing games, feeding the fish and getting washable farm animal tattoos.

Use of the farm was donated to Unaka High School by Pattie and John Drop. The collaborative was John’s brainchild and incorporates three key components: community service, mentorship and outreach.

“John wanted to share farming and the message that it is a good way of life with kids, so his daughter formed his vision into the collaborative,” said UHS Career and Technical Training Assistant Principal Melissa Loveless.

UHS students in FFA and the SAE programs plant and harvest crops, care for livestock and maintain the farm. All responsibilities are balanced between the two student groups, and their duties begin at 6 a.m. with feeding a calf.

FFA students said they learned that farm work is not limited to tasks in the garden and barn, but it includes property maintenance like fixing the tractor, installing fencing, building a chicken coop and painting the house.

“People think that agriculture is just planting, harvesting and fairly easy work, but this shows that a lot more goes into it,” said FFA student Jacob Rash.

SEA student Savannah Wood said they learned about proper use of pesticides, tools and safety. She and the other two SEA students Jacob Graybeal and Israel Harrah said they gained a sense of discipline, responsibility and patience by being involved.

Wood plans to either be a teacher or to work with wildlife rehabilitation and said the program helped her narrow down her career goals.

SEA is a class for seniors in the agricultural studies program that have completed prerequisites in animal science and meat processing to get experience growing food and raising livestock. They donated over 200 pounds of food to Second Harvest and Carter Christian Church’s food bank in this first semester of the program. They grew corn, peppers, tomatoes, pumpkins, beans and tomatoes, among other crops.

“The idea is to get hands-on farm experience, to learn responsibility and to give back to the community,” said Armentrout. He said some of his students intend to pursue careers in agriculture, while others work on the farm for the experience and education.

FFA student Austin Taylor said it is something they could always do later in life, whether they do it out of high school or not.

The Drop by the Farm Day, to continue Friday with Hunter and Keenburb Elementary Schools, was an opportunity for UHS students to be interactive mentors with children and to show them what a farm looks like and the various activities that happen on a farm.

“They get to see us participating and caring and taking time out of our day to help them learn and grow,” said Wood. It was Unaka Elementary student Madison Reece’s first time on a farm. She saw a turkey, chickens and a bunny, but her favorite part of the day was seeing the calf.

Her dad David said, “This teaches them about the area and what happens on a farm, and the kids really seem to enjoy it.”