



Students learn about farms and food during Rural Education Day

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Ask kids where food comes from, and most will tell you a store.

Tuesday at the Jackson County Fairgrounds, 925 third-graders from 13 Jackson County schools learned food comes from farms.

"It just doesn't come off the shelf," said Steve Wallenwine, co-chairman with Becky Lozuaway of Rural Education Day. "The farmer has to raise and care for it before it becomes dinner."

Wallenwine and Lozuaway said Rural Education Day, a partnership of several farm and agriculture organizations, gives students firsthand knowledge of farm life. They get to see and, in most cases, pet sheep, goats, rabbits, pigs, horses and cows. They also get to hear farmers talk about their work.

Dale Thorne, a sheep farmer from Hanover, told students he is a "real-life shepherd," that female sheep are called ewes and that he was going to shear one for them.

Thorne grabbed an ewe, sat her down, and with the students watching quietly, cut the wool off her. He then gave a piece of wool to the students to pass around and told them it felt oily because it contains lanolin, an ingredient they could probably find in skin lotions they have at home.

Alex Heerlyn, a third-grader at Paragon Charter Academy, said before Tuesday he had only seen sheep from inside a car. "It was really cool to see one up close," Alex said.

Classmate Abby Fretwell said the wool was soft, and she liked watching Thorne remove it from the ewe. "It's like getting a haircut," Abby said.

Thorne told the students he only gets about \$1 apiece for the wool, but he gets \$125 apiece for lamb meat and that's how he makes his living.

Paragon teacher Charles Hunt said Rural Education Day helped his students make the connection between food and farms.

Jackson County Fair Manager Steve Thelen, who also is a beef farmer, said giving students "an appreciation of the whole food chain" is what the day is all about.

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