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EMBRYOLOGY PROGRAM HATCHES FIRST TURKEY

Uniontown, PA – Through its ever-expanding agricultural efforts, Penn State Fayette Extension’s embryology program recently hatched its first turkey.

The embryology program offers a life science curriculum which teaches kids about development as they incubate and hatch poultry eggs in their schools.

Jennifer Deichert, Extension Educator, 4-H & Youth Development, began offering the program to local school districts five years ago. This spring, 17 classrooms celebrated successful hatches.

“I go into the classroom at the beginning and explain how the embryos are developing,” she said. “I teach students how they’re going to simulate what happens naturally right there in their classrooms.”

Poultry farmer Ed Stanish of Uniontown supplies the program’s fertilized chicken eggs and, when Deichert wanted to try something new, thought turkey eggs would do the trick.

“It’s a very similar process to the chickens, but turkey eggs are larger so they require longer incubation,” Deichert said. “It was a first for me with the program, so it was exciting because it was something different and a little bit unique.”

Lafayette Elementary/Middle School science teacher Rob Schiffbauer was the first to introduce his students to turkey eggs. Deichert said Schiffbauer tailored several lesson plans around the incubation process.

“The program is important because a lot of times teachers’ hands are kind of tied when it comes to what they’re required to teach in terms of textbook learning,” Deichert said. “This is hands-on learning where the kids are acting as scientists and they have that responsibility of making sure conditions are correct in order for embryos to grow, hatch and be successful.”

The multi-purpose program teaches students how to work together and apply real-life skills they can use in the future, all while promoting agricultural awareness, Deichert added.



Those promotional efforts extend beyond the classroom, as Deichert annually implements the embryology program at the Fayette County Fair.

This year, the fair takes place July 26 to Aug. 4, with the latest batch of eggs set to hatch that first weekend in the 4-H Youth Building at the Fayette County Fairgrounds.

A global network of youth organizations, 4-H aims to help youth reach their full potential through a variety of programs. Its name represents four personal development areas: head, heart, hands and health.

“In my opinion, 4-H is a wonderful program that, in a very basic way, is providing opportunities and the vehicle for caring adults to guide youth through their development into successful people who will have unique skill sets,” Deichert said. “Just the structure and the skeleton of 4-H is developing all those skills, such as embryology, that the youth don’t even realize they’re developing because they’re just having fun.”

Fayette County Commissioner Vince Vicites said Deichert’s work through the extension and 4-H programs is extremely positive.

“This program provides guidance and learning experiences that will last a lifetime so our Fayette County youth can be productive citizens in our community,” Vicites said.

Commissioner Angela Zimmerlink said agriculture plays a huge role in Fayette County.

“The extension program, along with the parents and volunteers, have done a great job in helping to educate the younger generation about agriculture and the 4-H programs,” Zimmerlink said.

Commissioner Dave Lohr said children who participate in embryology and other 4-H programs become respectful, responsible people.

“I have been to the 4-H sales at the county fair and see how their dedication and love for what they are doing is in their hearts,” Lohr said. “They are our future and, from what I’ve seen, we have a really great group coming up. Thanks to all who participate in those programs.”

Deichert said it’s important for her to continue promoting agriculture’s various facets and trying new things - like turkeys - because, despite growing up in largely-rural Fayette County, many children “do not understand where their food is coming from, or the vastness and relevance of that process.”

“A few years ago, I asked a third-grade class to tell me what agriculture is, and I was surprised when so many didn’t know what that word meant,” she said. “It was hard for them to grasp that chickens don’t just exist without the incubation process or their food doesn’t just appear on the shelf in Giant Eagle.



“Everything started somewhere, and it’s important for us to get out there to the classrooms and the fair and help kids understand that relationship.”

For more information on Deichert’s efforts and Penn State Fayette Extension’s various programming, visit www.extension.psu.edu. For more information on the Fayette County Fair, visit www.fayettefair.com.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.info.

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