

Agriculture

Welcome to the farm

Cleveland students learn about farm life at Smithville dairy farm

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Where does your milk come from? How about the chicken nuggets you gobbled down at lunch or the steak you grilled at your barbecue?

Cleveland Catholic High School students and their teachers visited Besancon Farms Inc., Smithville, a couple weeks ago to experience firsthand the hard work required to bring food to their dinner table. The Besancon farm has been in the family since 1966 and consists of 700 crop acres. Co-owner Brent Besancon said he and his brother, Frank, grow corn, alfalfa, soybeans and wheat. Their brother, Bernie, also works at the farm. The 15 students are members of the Catholic Schools for Peace and Justice, which is made up of high schools and colleges in the Cleveland Diocese.



To start off the morning, they followed Besancon into the double-12 parallel milking parlor, where he showed them how to milk cows using milking units. Then, he allowed them to hand-milk a cow. As students watched milk squirt from the cow's teats. "The looks on their faces were priceless," he said, noting they were also fascinated with her size. "They really enjoyed themselves." Shannon Pierce said she enjoyed learning how farmers advanced from milking by hand to using machines. "Watching the milk come out is pretty fun," she said. "I didn't know milk went to so many different cooperatives. I thought it all came from one company."

After students left the milking parlor, they sat on bales in the hay mow and listened to presentations by Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center research interns and Orrville veterinarian Gabe Middleton, who grew up in Smithville. During his talk, Middleton showed dehorning and castrating equipment. For safety reasons, he said he recommends taking off horns when calves are at a young age. Also, he compared cats' and cows' heart rates. He said a heart rate of a cat is about 150-200 beats per minute, whereas a cow's is about 60-80 beats per minute.



Of 140 students in his Ohio State University veterinary class, he said only 10 went to school to treat large animals like cows and horses. "To get into vet school, the number one thing they look at is grades," he said, commenting he made an extra effort to work alongside veterinarians.

"Cows can't talk, so it's very difficult to be a veterinarian," added Besancon. "Cows can't tell you what's wrong."

Middleton said most kids growing up in the city don't have an understanding of food production. "There's a reality to farming, and teaching children about farming at an early age will give them a positive image of agriculture," he said.

"By immersing them in farm life, students will meet rural teens and learn the difference between raising livestock and owning pets," said Diocese of Cleveland Rural Life Director Patrick O'Bryan. O'Bryan said he is also working on a "City Family, Country Family; Discovering our Rural Connection's" project, in which students write stories about their rural/farming ancestry. "Our goal is to develop a rural to urban connection," he said. He said he wanted students to get a complete farm experience. "We want them to have an appreciation for the food on their table," he said.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in." (Matthew 25:35)