

Title

Candler County Ag Day Increases Youth Agricultural Awareness

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Year

2023

Geographic Scope

County

County

Candler

Unit/Department/Group

4-H & Youth, Agriculture & Natural Resources

Summary

Agriculture is the largest industry in Georgia with an impact of over \$70 billion annually. While Candler County is very rural, most local students do not have personal experience with agriculture; they are often 2 or more generations removed from the farm. To increase agricultural appreciation and awareness among these youth, a team of Candler County Extension Faculty and Agricultural Education Faculty created a program featuring 21 booths from local agricultural interest groups and businesses for elementary and middle school students in Candler County to gain more hands-on agricultural experience. Many older 4-H and FFA members also shared about their projects and interest areas.

Situation

Today, only 2% of the nation's population live on working farms. As a result, this can lead to misunderstandings regarding agricultural issues such as the environment, farming methods, and food safety (Nordstrom et al., 2000) along with widespread misconceptions and lack of awareness regarding modern agricultural careers and practices. While food and fiber production and directly related processing industry sectors contribute 352,430 jobs to Georgia's economy (University of Georgia Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development, 2022), there is still a lack of knowledge of these careers among today's youth. In Candler County, agriculture is the largest industry with an annual farm gate value of over \$41 million in 2021. The top agricultural commodities in Candler County are cotton, peanuts, onions, timber, hay, beef cattle, pecans, pine straw and tobacco. Agricultural awareness programs "have the potential to influence agricultural literacy by allowing students to explore the complexity of agriculture and how it affects their everyday life" (Luckey et al., 2013). Through career and industry exposure, youth can make informed decisions about the vital agriculture industry and their potential place in it. While agricultural literacy is often presented from a consumer

standpoint, studies are showing the importance of integrating agriculture and science teaching into a true multi-discipline approach, called agri-science (Rice & Kitchel, 2017; Rice & Parker, 2018, Despain, North, Warnock & Baggaley, 2016).

Response

The Candler County 4-H and ANR Agents met with agriculture teachers at Metter Elementary and Metter Middle School to formulate a program to provide students in grades PreK-8 with an interactive glimpse into the agriculture industry. This program was designed provide supplemental education related to agriculture, science and careers standards of the Georgia Standards of Excellence. A one-day program was designed to showcase the importance and diversity of agriculture in Georgia. By highlighting this vital industry, students might realize the impact that agriculture has on their daily lives and gain and increased interest in agricultural careers.

Students were divided into three groups based on grade level. Within each of these three groups, they visited different agricultural industry advocates to gain exposure and knowledge through hands-on learning. Each agricultural advocate created a presentation that was age-appropriate and focused on one or more segments of the agriculture industry.

- Students in Pre-K through 2nd grade planted seeds, learned about produce ingredients used in salsa, participated in a petting zoo and learned about farm and forestry equipment. They also played games and drew agricultural pictures with chalk.
- Students in grades 3-5 learned about agricultural finance and lending, water conservation, Georgia's most important crop commodities and electricity. A group of these students also visited the Georgia Mobile Dairy Classroom.
- 6th-8th grade students visited booths focusing on livestock, wildlife, agribusiness, tractor safety and welding. Many of these had a specific career focus for this older age group.

At the end of the day, all students were invited to a burn demonstration hosted by the Metter Fire Department and the Georgia Forestry Air Ops unit.

In total, there were 3 booths that showcased livestock and animal science, 4 related to forestry and natural resources, 5 related to agricultural mechanics, 4 related to agribusiness, 3 showcasing row crop commodities and 2 that addressed fruits and vegetables.

Impact

1,584 youth in grades Pre-K to 8 participated in the Candler County Ag Day on March 24, 2023. Each participant visited the educational booths designed for their age group for 60-75 minutes, given between 10-15 minutes for each presentation. Over 35 adult volunteers provided the educational content for the program. Following the event, teachers were surveyed to gather feedback. 91% of teachers agreed that the program activities were age-appropriate and had high educational value.

One 4th grade teacher stated "Ag Day connected lessons from class to real life and aligned with our science standards." Another teacher said, "I can tell that my students were learning so much by participating in this event." Other teachers commented that the career exposure and

connection was wonderful. A 5th grade parent said that her child learned more about agriculture on this day than any other program she has participated in previously.

In the weeks following the event, through host group was asked to replicate and expand the program in 2024. Plans are already underway for another event. The 2024 program will survey a group of students to gauge the knowledge gained by participating in the program.