

Redmond Schools to offer FFA pork

By Kailey Fiscaro
The Bulletin

REDMOND (AP) — Two Redmond High School FFA students will know exactly the work that went into a few cafeteria menu items coming soon to Redmond schools. The two teens raised hogs they later sold to Redmond School District's nutrition services department, and the meat will be used to make dishes including breakfast sausage, carnitas and pulled pork.

Lance Hill, who teaches agriculture and leads FFA (formerly Future Farmers of America) at Redmond High School, connected with Keith Fiedler, general manager of nutrition services for the district, months back. The two were discussing eventually having kids grow produce for the district, when Fiedler said he'd be interested in buying local meat as well.

"I said, 'We'd be open to purchasing livestock,' and (Hill) said, 'That's interesting,'" Fiedler said.

Hill kept Fiedler's pitch to purchase pigs in mind, and called him a few months ago to see whether the school district would want to buy three hogs.

"He said, 'I have some students that if they don't sell at fair would like to sell to you,'" Fiedler said.

Taylor Blankenship, 17, a junior and FFA member, said she'd call her past season of raising pigs, from early spring to late summer, an "unlucky" one. She wasn't able to sell either of her pigs, Princess or Precious, at the Deschutes County Fair. She showed Princess at the fair, but her pig came in under the weight required to be sold. She didn't bring Precious to fair at all, since she knew that porker wouldn't "make weight."

Although Taylor named the animals, the pigs aren't pets; the goal is to sell them for meat, and without the opportunity to do so at fair, she felt at a loss.

"We weren't sure what we would do," Taylor said of

herself and her parents.

To her delight, Taylor's two pigs, and a pig of her classmate's, ended up being bought by the school district.

"I honestly think it's cool," Taylor said of knowing the meat will be eaten by her fellow students.

Jake Pickering, 18, a senior and fellow FFA member, didn't have the unlucky year Taylor did, but selling one of his pigs to the school district was still a win.

The animal he ended up selling was one he had shown at the state fair. He won some prize money with it, which was a plus, but at the state fair, he couldn't sell his animal for meat.

"It was nice because it definitely cut my expenses a lot," Jake said of selling the pig to the school district. He also likes the idea of the meat being used in school lunches, he said, because students will get to eat "homegrown pork."

Fiedler, who was an executive chef in the past, has always preferred using local produce and meat, even before it was trendy.

"Throughout my whole career, I've always bought local, long before there was a term," he said. "It's always been important for several reasons, first of all you're supporting your local economy, second of all there's a certain excitement about who grew your food. Thirdly, there's a really good chance it's better or fresher."

Redmond School District's nutrition services also buys organic potatoes from Juniper Jungle Farm in east Bend and meat from Painted Hills Natural Beef in Fossil. Fiedler would like to expand the amount the district is buying local; he's interested in finding local apples and peaches, when they are in peak season.

The district paid \$4 a pound for the pigs, at carcass weight, directly to the students. Hill said \$4 is above the \$2 average a lot of pigs might bring, but below what kids can get at the fair, where community members are

especially generous in support of the kids.

The \$4 per pound the district paid reflected its appreciation of the quality of the animals, Hill said, which are healthy, locally grown and treated humanely. Over summer Hill checks in with the students about once a week: they all bring their livestock to a local designated farm where Hill can help check their weights and health. Having the animals travel once a week allows them to feel at ease when it comes time for the fair.

"What are the pigs doing when you see them at fair?" Hill said. "Sleeping."

That's because the animals aren't stressed out by the travel they went through or their new environment. That's his students' goal: to give them a happy, humane life.

Although a pig for a family would stock a freezer for quite some time, the amount of meat that comes from three pigs isn't all that much for a school district with thousands of students. The three pigs ended up yielding about 800 pounds of meat. Fiedler said most of it will be served at Redmond High School and Ridgeview as the sausage, carnitas and pulled pork Cuban sandwiches as soon as next month.

"The beauty of creating a tradition of doing these things is the word spreads," Fiedler said. His hope: to get more local food into students' stomachs.

LIFE SKILLS: Students enjoy their jobs and save their money

Continued from page 3

The elimination of funding for sheltered workshop agencies has encouraged schools to continue to create more individualized training and employment opportunities for the students that fit the qualifications.

This fall, the Sisters School District has worked with Heart of Oregon and the State of Oregon's Vocational Rehab and Oregon Department of Human Services to create more jobs. Through Heart of Oregon they will hire four job trainers for students in the SHS Life Skills program.

"We will be taking Life Skills mentors, once they turn 18, and hiring them into a part-time job trainer," said Nordell. "This is a great opportunity to get job trainers for our local community and for the student hired. A position like this is a great step into the field of social work."

In addition to the partnership with Vocational Rehab, the Sisters School District has hired four Life Skills students for custodial work within the schools. Students help with vacuuming, cleaning windows, removing trash from under the bleachers after football games and cleaning computer keyboards.

The four positions were developed specifically for the students hired: Max Huni, Michaela Madsen, Brian Groat and Levi Vigil.

"We worked hard to create jobs that will train these students so we can help them transition into a community job," said Dan Saraceno, the youth transition specialist and counselor for the Sisters School District. "Some of these students (due to their varying needs of support) may not be able to transition into a different location. The job within the District will be available to them as long as they want to continue with it."

Students don't work more than two hours a day, and many of the jobs are primarily during the school day.

Junior Max Huni says, "My job, cleaning windows. It's going pretty well. I'm still learning things — but I'm glad I get paid!"

"I'm still learning things — but I'm glad I get paid!"
— Max Huni

Huni is saving his money for a new Nintendo Switch game system that comes out next spring.

Senior Brian Groat has been vacuuming, dusting, and cleaning. He is also saving his money for the new NBA2K17 video game.

"I like picking up the trash under the bleachers the best," said Groat.

"This program adds value and raises their self-esteem," said Nordell. "They get a uniform and are participating in work that is benefitting the school."



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