

FFA program prepares students for future

Ag organization connects students to their roots in agriculture

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

With experts predicting more than 9 billion hungry mouths on the planet by 2050, the need for skilled and knowledgeable agricultural workers armed with the latest ideas and technologies is more important than ever before.

The world will need workers trained in precision agriculture, "ranching and farming by the inch," Adam Ineck told the Eagle.

Raised on a row-crop farm in southwest Idaho that produced corn, alfalfa and commercial beef cattle, Ineck is the ag ed teacher at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School.

He has a bachelor of science in agriculture educa-



Grant Union FFA chapter members surround the 1,100 pounds of nonperishable food donated through the Oregon FFA and Les Schwab Tire Centers "Drive Away Hunger" campaign. From left are Raney Anderson, Kori Jo Girvin, Jessie Stubbs, Logan Namitz, Cole Ashley, Celine Hicks, Mariah Kerr, Cinch Anderson, Parker Manitsas, Emilie Updegrave, Sierra Cates, Billy Radinovich and Ellie Justice.



Contributed photos

Attending the National FFA Convention & Expo are, from left, Grant Union Career Coordinator Kristi Moore, FFA adviser Adam Ineck, FFA members Cinch Anderson, Emilie Updegrave, Ellie Justice, Parker Manitsas, Kori Jo Girvin, Hailey Carter and chaperones Jennifer Carter and Cori Anderson.

tion from the University of Idaho and is pursuing a master's in agriculture education through Oregon State University. He's been an ag ed teacher and FFA advisor for the past 15 years.

"I often tell people I'm a farmer by birth, teacher by trade and an agriculturist by choice," he said.

High-tech farming
Evolving agricultural technologies include drones, thermal imagery, precision planting and robotics. But a recent survey by the Land O'Lakes Foundation found that only 3 percent of surveyed college graduates said they had considered a career in agriculture.

According to Purdue University, the 34,500 new graduates with expertise in food, agriculture, renewable natural resources and environmental issues will fill just 61 percent of the 57,900 job openings expected annually. Ineck hopes to help address that need by exposing high

school students to the diversity of the "natural resource, food and fiber system."

"It's more than cows, plows and sows," he said.

His goal is to prepare students for their next step, whether it's a two- or four-year college or heading off straight to work. His classes and the FFA program are laying the groundwork for the problem-solvers of the future.

Ag workers will need to understand how to use pedometers and GPS to track individual cows on a cell-phone app, and what types of crops and soils work best with precision drip irrigation, Ineck said. This drive for efficiency generates numerous opportunities for students who go into agriculture, he said.

Agricultural productivity has dramatically increased in just the past half century. The average amount of milk

produced per cow increased from 5,314 pounds per year in 1950 to 18,201, the average yield of corn rose from 39 bushels per acre to 153 and each farmer produced on average 12 times as much farm output per hour in 2000 as a farmer in 1950.

In 1870, about half the people in the U.S. were employed in agriculture. Today it's less than 2 percent. Americans today are two or three generations removed from a life on the family farm, Ineck said.

"I'm trying to reconnect them to their sources," he said.

The FFA program became a national organization in 1928 when it was known as Future Farmers of America. The name was changed to the National FFA Organization in 1988 and is now commonly referred to as FFA, with more than 669,000 members in more than 8,600 chapters guided by more than 13,000 agriculture educators.

The FFA experience

Ellie Justice, a junior at Grant Union, lives on a small farm outside Prairie City that raises nursery plants. Her family hears back to homesteading days on her father's side and a grandfather on her mother's side who came to Grant County and got into logging.

Justice said she's been involved in 4-H since elementary school and has raised sheep, chickens, beef cows and crickets. The latter

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