

From the farm to the school

Prairie City students learning and growing what they eat

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Prairie City students are putting food on the table.

The Farm to School program implemented this school year at Prairie City School District is teaching students from preschool through sixth grade where their food comes from while providing their cafeteria with food they grew on campus.

Farm to School Coordinator Amanda Rockhill said the kids in the program really enjoy the class because they get to work hard raising something they can eat as they manage cattle, crops and chickens on campus.

"They get their hands dirty, and they're in charge of the things that are out here," Rockhill said. "I told them from the start, 'Guys, these are not my chickens. This is not my garden. This is your guys' garden and chickens.'"

Every kid from preschool to sixth grade, about 114 in total, gets a chance to participate in the program for 30 minutes every other day. Rockhill said the kids love going outside to work with the animals, land labs and the chicken coop that was built this year.

Sixth-grader Bristol Bailey said she loves to see all the animals and take care of them while learning about them, especially the goats.

Tatyn Harper, a sixth-



Fifth- and sixth-grade girls begin shoveling out straw on March 18.

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Amanda Rockhill holds one of the goats that was recently born.

grader, said he enjoys the program because he likes to work with animals and the chance to work outside of a classroom. He said he likes to feed pigs and cows in the program because it's what he does at home.

Harper said he got to learn many things about chickens that he didn't know before, such as the process chickens go through before they hatch.

"Before I came, I knew nothing about chickens, and then we hatched a couple last weekend," Harper said. "(Rockhill) showed us how many days it takes for a chicken to hatch and how to take care of it."

Students get to gather eggs every day, clean the

coop and feed and water the chickens. The fifth- and sixth-graders just finished incubating eggs in their classroom while learning how the embryo grows in its 21-day cycle, Rockhill said.

The kids also raised two hogs and two steers that were recently sent to the butcher.

"The kids cleaned up after them, they watered them, they fed them, the whole enchilada," Rockhill said. "They were tiny little pigs, and we talked about what they were for. They will be eaten and used in the cafeteria."

Sixth-grader Chet Workman said he likes the opportunity to work outside with animals, especially the steers, goats and pigs.



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Amanda Rockhill said the second-graders love to work with the chickens. The chicken coop produces around 20 eggs daily.

"I liked feeding them and working with them," Workman said. "I definitely



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Sonja Harig, left, and Rylee Workman help clear out rocks on March 18.

learned how to take care of animals, what to feed them and how many days it will be until they're born."

Rockhill said the kids learned about different cuts of meat and how they can be used in different dishes.

"The kids thought it was pretty cool," Rockhill said. "Yeah, it's pig meat, but they didn't grasp the entire picture. There's pork chops, bacon, sausage, which are all different things that came from the same animal."

There are also four goats in their land labs that have been giving birth over the past couple of months, providing the opportunity to care for the newborn goats and learn about the different breeds.

Rockhill said the Farm to School program helps students better understand the wide range of agriculture in Oregon.

"We talked about the fish industry, and they never thought about that as part of agriculture," Rockhill said. "You wouldn't think so, because when you think of agriculture you think of cows."

Rockhill said watching the students learn new facts about agriculture has been enjoyable.

"When they learn something new they're just so fun, and I like when they come up and tell me a random fact on agriculture," Rockhill said.

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