

Agriculture in the Classroom: Ag Literacy Day

Recently, staff from the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District visited some of our local schools. *These Florida Farms!*, a book written by Gary Seamans and illustrated by Mike Wright, is this year's pick to be read to students attending Heartland Christian School and Lake Placid Elementary School. This year marks the sixth annual Florida Agriculture Literacy Day, which is a program by Florida Agriculture in the Classroom, Inc. (FAITC) and is designed to help teachers and students gain a better understanding of Florida agriculture. The book was written for young children at a pre-school and elementary school level.

Every year, volunteers are asked to visit local schools around the state and read a special book written for FAITC. This year's selection, *These Florida Farms*, is a rhyming book in which students learn about Florida agriculture by touring farms around the state with a safari guide. It is the hope of FAITC that by helping to educate the state's future voters and elected officials about the significance of Florida's food and fiber system, our sunshine state will have a brighter future and the agricultural industry that we all rely on so much, will be more secure.

Clell Ford, Lakes Manager will visit Heartland Christian School's Kindergarten, first and second grade classes. Last year Clell read to about 40 children. He stated that "The kids are always excited when you interact with them, they learned a lot. It's good to have them ask questions and realize that they know that there are farms with ostriches and gators on them!" The experience was a positive one and he always looks forward to Ag Literacy Day because he enjoys being a part of this important learning experience. He looks forward to reading to the students again this year.

The six Kindergarten classes at Lake Placid Elementary School were selected by Erin McCarta, Lakes Management Assistant, for the reading. "Actually, I was surprised that the kids were a little more aware of what kind of farms are out there. I didn't expect them to know so much. The kids I read to were more aware of agriculture than the children portrayed in the book."

"The Agriculture Council of America and its supporters are committed to increasing public awareness about American agriculture. As the world population soars, there is even greater demand for the food and fiber produced in the United States.

The National Ag Day program believes that every American should:

- Understand how food, fiber and renewable resource products are produced.
- Value the essential role of agriculture in maintaining a strong economy.
- Appreciate the role agriculture plays in providing safe, abundant and affordable products.
- Acknowledge and consider career opportunities in the agriculture, food, fiber and renewable resource industries."

Here are some fun facts about agricultural products. Share them with your kids and grandchildren!

- Americans today consume 17.3 billion quarts of popped popcorn each year! The average American eats about 68 quarts!
- The same chemicals that give tart cherries their color may relieve pain better than aspirin and ibuprofen in humans.
- Lettuce is a member of the sunflower family.
- The bright orange color of carrots tells you they're an excellent source of Vitamin A which is important for good eyesight, especially at night. Vitamin A helps your body fight infection, and keeps your skin and hair healthy!
- Over 200 million pounds of blueberries are grown every year in North America.
- The egg shell may have as many as 17,000 tiny pores over its surface. Through them, the egg can absorb flavors and odors. Storing them in their cartons helps keep them fresh!
- Eggs age more in one day at room temperature than in one week in the refrigerator.
- Although generally regarded as a tree, the banana plant is really an herb. That means it does not have a woody trunk like a tree. The stalk is composed of leaf sheaths that overlap each other and grow from an underground stem called a rhizome.
- Apples are a member of the rose family.
- If you grew 100 apple trees from the seeds of one tree, they would all be different. In early colonial times, pumpkins were used as an ingredient for the crust of pies, not the filling.
- Bananas are most likely the first fruit ever to be grown on a farm.

To find out more about programs and school visits from Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District staff, please give us a call at (863) 402-6545.