

Growing Connections: A Hands-On Agricultural Experience Bridging Classrooms and Fields

What began as a simple idea from a local Farm Bureau member and parent has grown into a one-of-a-kind agricultural education program—one that is transforming how students in our community understand where their food comes from.

The inspiration was rooted in a common concern: the growing disconnect between today’s youth and agriculture. Recognizing this gap, one parent approached the local school board with a bold proposal—to create a hands-on farm experience for middle school students. The idea was met with enthusiasm, and planning began at the grassroots level.

Collaborating closely with the school’s principal, superintendent, and seventh- and eighth-grade teachers, we developed a program that would span both spring and fall semesters. As the landowner, I joined the planning process alongside local farmers and our Regional Farm Bureau Director to finalize logistics. While the event takes place on land my family owns and farms, we invited a neighboring farmer to lead the planting demonstration using his 12-row planter equipped with advanced precision ag technology. Though not previously active in Farm Bureau, he embraced the opportunity and quickly became a key partner—passionately explaining his equipment and answering student questions with infectious enthusiasm.



Adapting to the Elements

Like all farmers, we are at the mercy of the weather. Planning dates a week in advance helps us avoid rain, which is critical since students walk nearly half a mile across athletic fields to reach the farm. Wet conditions can delay or even prevent planting altogether.

This spring, persistent rain forced us to adapt. Instead of canceling, we moved the event to the school parking lot. The neighboring farmer brought his planter and demonstrated how it unfolds—a sight most students had never seen up close. For an hour, we discussed agriculture,

answered questions, and emphasized a key lesson: no matter how advanced technology, farming still relies on flexibility and resilience. That message proved just as powerful as hands-on planting.



A Unique, Multi-Season Experience

Now in its third year, the program is more than just a one-day field trip—it is a multi-phase, immersive experience. In previous years, students participated in spring planting just before summer break, returning in the fall to harvest sweet corn during the first week of school—right before it became overripe. After harvesting, students husk the corn in the field and bring it back to school, where it is cooked and served for lunch.

To deepen the farm-to-table connection, my family also donates ground beef from our cattle operation. Students see—and taste—local food production in action.

To our knowledge, no other county Farm Bureau offers ongoing, hands-on experience like this in direct partnership with a local school district. Spanning multiple seasons and grade levels, the program allows students to follow the full cycle of crop production while connecting it to broader themes like food systems, ag technology, and career paths.

Impact Beyond the Classroom

This initiative has significantly advanced the mission of our county Farm Bureau—agricultural advocacy, education, and community engagement. While we have always supported ag literacy,

this program has taken our efforts to a new level. We consistently receive strong TV and newspaper coverage, amplifying our message far beyond the classroom and into the homes of thousands of residents.

As I often remind our members, “Farm Bureau does a lot of good work for our members and the ag community—but if the media is not there to share it, it is like winking in the dark. We know we are doing it, but no one else does.”

That visibility matters. We have heard from parents, teachers, and even complete strangers who saw the coverage and reached out to thank us. The event has strengthened relationships with schools, brought in new member participation (including farmers previously uninvolved with Farm Bureau), and reinforced our reputation as a proactive, community-focused organization.

A Model for the Future

The results speak for themselves. Students leave with a deeper understanding of where their food comes from—and the science, technology, and hard work behind it. Teachers report students returning to class energized and full of questions. For many, it is their first meaningful connection to agriculture.

For the broader community, the event shines spotlight on local farming and builds trust in the people who grow their food. It has become a powerful tool for improving ag literacy and generating pride in local food production.

This initiative is more than just a success story; it is a blueprint. A model that other counties could replicate to bridge the growing gap between consumers and producers. By combining meaningful education with strategic visibility, we are not only fulfilling our mission, but we are also helping shape the next generation’s relationship with agriculture.

