

What it takes to run a farm
Southampton students learn about tractors, soils, plants
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CAPRON

Second graders of the Southampton County public schools and the academy got close looks at what's going down on a farm. This took place last Friday at Foxhill Farms in Capron, and was coordinated by Jennifer Coker, the Conservation Education technician of the Chowan Basin Soil and Water Conservation District. Clarke Fox said this was the fourth year his place has hosted the program. That came about when the Chowan group made the request, which Fox said he was glad to participate. "It's my way of giving back to the community," he said.

While the children were not actually expected to help with preparing the soil or driving tractors for planting, they did learn about both at the learning stations set up for them.

There were 11 sites total that also ranged from petting farm critters, such as the lambs Inkspot and Butterscotch, to learning about the ingredients that go into the foods we enjoy eating. Eric Brittle of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries brought deer skulls and antlers along with snakeskins, turkey feathers and a bobcat pelt for the youngsters to see and touch. Nearby, Scott Bachman and Travis Tindell from the Virginia Department of Forestry brought related articles for examination. Neil Clark talked about how lumber is obtained from forests, and Joshua Holland took groups to see huge farm equipment such as tractors and harvesters; both men are from the Southampton County Extension Service.

In the mobile dairy classroom, LaVaun Janney of Southland Dairy Farm brought Ginger, a 3-year-old cow. That way, the students can better understand that their milk comes from animals such as her, and not just the grocery store where cartons are bought.

"It was a very good turnout," Coker said about the attendance. "It's the second year that I've been a part of it. They [the students] get to see the process — it's important and amazing. They inspire me." Similar presentations are done in neighboring Greensville and Sussex counties. In between such programs, Coker is available to do in-class presentations at schools. Contact her at 434-336-6243 to learn more about the programs.

Pearls of learning

Students continue to explore marine life

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SUFFOLK

On Tuesday, area students participating in the Tidewater Regional Governor's School this summer discovered another aspect of marine life: Oysters. These were the subject of the continued hands-on studies at Pioneer Elementary School in Suffolk. This was part of the "Deeper Learning" program that began last week.

Leslie Moring, executive director of the TRGS, said 60 identified rising fourth through seventh graders from Isle of Wight, Southampton, Franklin and Suffolk were invited.

As she had previously stated, "This program is important because through experimentation, observation and research, students get to work in cross-age groups to explore the technology, engineering, and arts involved in marine science. Students have the opportunity to gain real world experience and to showcase what they have learned through a culminating project."

Leading the first session was Katia McCarter, assistant to oyster restoration for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. She said the creatures are "hugely important" as each one can filter about 50 gallons of water a day. Oysters donated from 78 Virginia restaurants were taken out of large buckets and put into bags. Once tied, they would go into tanks the next year to be seeded with oyster larvae. McCarter said those oysters would eventually be go into the Lynnhaven River.

In the second session, the students got to see the inside of oysters and identify their anatomy. Again, the importance of oysters and the restoration program was emphasized.

For the third session, Heather Locklear of the CBF led discussion about the oyster gardening cage and dissection of another important fish the bay: Menhaden. The students were paired up to dissect the fish.

Report of weapon compelled schools' lockdown
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COURTLAND

The report of a student bringing a weapon to Southampton High School on Friday launched an immediate lockdown shortly before noon on Friday. As a precautionary measure, the adjoining middle school was soon secured with no one allowed to enter or leave either facilities.

Lt. Camden Cobb, a spokesman for the Southampton County Sheriff's Office, told *The Tidewater News* via email that the aforementioned student had been identified and separated from classmates. No weapon was found on the suspect, and the schools were searched using deputies and K-9 units.

Supt. Dr. Gwendolyn Shannon later told the paper that another student had made the report.

No actual weapon was found, but what was discovered was a plastic Airsoft gun. These are realistic-looking replicas of actual weapons, such as rifles, and are used in airsoft games. The toys are not intended either to injure or kill.

That student — a juvenile — was put into the custody of the Southampton County Sheriff's office. Shannon had added appropriate disciplinary actions have been taken.

The lockdown was ended shortly before 2 p.m., and school operations resumed.

Both the school administration and division are continuing to work with the Sheriff's Office in the investigation.

“The quick steps taken today by school administration, in collaboration with the Southampton County Sheriff's Office, were to ensure the safety and security of all students and staff,” Shannon stated. “I appreciate your support of our school division as we continue to be vigilant in ensuring a safe learning environment for all students and staff.”