

Perry Middle School students get the "straight facts" about agriculture at FVSU

By Annette Coward, public information editor

A group of 30 Perry Middle School students began 2007 with an in-depth look at agriculture at Fort Valley State University.

From 9 a.m. until noon on Jan. 23, seventh and eighth-graders toured the Advanced Technology Laboratory and Georgia Small Ruminant Research and Extension Center facilities. The students asked questions and got some hands-on experience in cutting-edge agricultural technology.

According to the group's teachers, the half-day visit was part of the Promoting Achievement with Students Program, a school effort funded by the federal Title I program that targets seventh and eighth-grade students who are at risk of not graduating.

Julie Bragg, PAWS lead teacher, said the eight-year-old program at her school "makes a difference."

"They are smart kids. Kids who are determined to succeed but have just gotten off on the wrong path," Bragg said. "This program encourages them to become more dedicated to learning and offers them exposure to different outlets like this educational tour of FVSU."

Bragg arranged the tour after participating in a science and education seminar on the FVSU campus last June.

In October she called Dr. Sarwan Dhir, an associate professor of plant science-biotechnology, and asked him if a campus visit was possible. He said it was.

Bragg, who has been teaching at Perry Middle School for nine years, said the trip was a wonderful opportunity to expose her students to life outside the middle school environment.

"My goal is for these kids to go to college," she said. "I wanted them to see life on a university campus and to discover the opportunities and the advantages that go with education beyond high school."

Dhir welcomed the students in the 1,500 square-foot Advanced Technology Laboratory housed in the Alva Tabor Agricultural Building.

During his welcome, Dhir explained where the students would go during their visit and described some of the activities they would enjoy while on the campus. He also outlined FVSU's role as a land-grant university and described some of the career opportunities and advantages that come with careers in agriculture and science.

After being welcomed, the students toured the laboratory where Dr. Hari Singh, plant science-biotechnology research associate, and research technicians Kaye Knowles and Heather Bowen demonstrated how to extract DNA from kiwi plant tissue and how to use plant tissue culture to clone plants.

The trio followed their demonstration by assisting the students in performing their own extraction and cloning procedures.

"I think the visit was an excellent opportunity to give middle school students an up-close look at the cutting-edge technology that's part of biotechnology," Dhir said. "I was very impressed by these young scientists as they conducted



Photo by Annette Coward
Jisela Gomez, 13, and a Perry Middle School classmate get 'up close and personal' with a dairy goat held by Fort Valley State University animal caretaker Kessler Lewis during a tour of the Georgia Small Ruminant Research and Extension Center's dairy facility.

their own independent experiments on DNA isolation and plant cloning here at the Center for Biotechnology facilities."

During the tours of the small ruminant center's meat and dairy technology facilities that followed the experiments, FVSU research scientists and specialists answered student's questions that ranged from how animals are slaughtered and processed to how meat is processed to how milk is made into cheese.

Meat Technology Center manager Terrell Hollis, and Singh stressed the importance of education during their question-and-answer session with the students.

"You should always have a goal in mind," Hollis told the students gathered in the MTC classroom. "It's an integral part of the education process."

"I want you guys to remember that college is the key," he continued. "It's definitely something you need to aim for."

Leaving the 15,000 square-foot MTC building, the students toured the dairy facility before returning to the Tabor building for lunch.

During lunch Singh noted, "There's nothing like watching the light bulb go off when these students make the connection between what you teach in the classroom with the real world. Hands-on experiences always spark the interest of a child."

Jeremy Davis, a 13-year-old from Perry said, "I now understand where the food I eat comes from."

Classmate Jisela Gomez, 13, also from Perry, echoed Jeremy's sentiment, "I have a completely different view of agriculture and all of the careers that it has to offer."

PAWS lead teacher, Bragg, added, "I loved this visit. If I can just get two students to think about going to college then that's half the battle. I'll definitely be doing everything in my power to make this tour an annual event starting in 2008."

FVSU professor honored by peers

By Ayanna McPhail, publications editor/writer

The Association of Social and Behavioral Sciences honored a long-time Fort Valley State University professor at its annual meeting March 22 in Atlanta.

The colleagues of Dr. Melvin Walker Jr., professor of agricultural economics, wanted to recognize their treasurer of more than 20 years for his hard work and dedication, said Patricia McGill-Tillman, chairwoman of the Marguerite Rogers Howie Distinguished Service Award selection committee.



Photo by Annette Coward
Dr. Melvin Walker Jr., a professor of agricultural economics at Fort Valley State University, received the Marguerite Rogers Howie Distinguished Service Award March 22 from the Association of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Walker is the fifth recipient of the award established to honor the late Rogers Howie, an association member who spent more than 40 years recruiting scientists from the southeast region of the United States and working on regional research projects.

"I've received lots of awards during my career, but this one was special because it was named after someone I worked with for a long time, and she was the kind of person who worked hard to make sure the organization involved the young scientists who were coming along," said Walker, who knew Rogers Howie for more than 25 years. "She was kind of like the mother hen of the organization, so I was pleased to receive the award because of that."

He has maintained tremendous financial records over the years and helped to print the Journal of Social and Behavioral Science with the help of Fort Valley State, McGill-Tillman said.

Honorees, who must be members of the association for 15 years, are chosen based on their contribution of time and service to the organization, said McGill-Tillman, a professor emerita for Jackson State University in Jackson, Miss.

"Of course it's loyalty and dedication to an organization that's important. We can't say enough about that," she said.

The association, established in 1935, provides opportunities for about 300 scholars who exchange ideas and information. The social scientists from historically black colleges and universities meet annually to discuss how they can improve social and economic conditions affecting the nation.

New medical techniques may come to the rescue

By Ayanna McPhail, publications editor/writer

Farm workers sometimes lose more than a finger tip when using equipment in the field. Limbs are severed and lives are lost.

When medical emergency personnel respond to situations involving agricultural machines, it's important they be prepared. Their training can save limbs – and possibly lives.

Thanks to a recent farming extrication workshop at the Southwest Georgia Research and Education Center in Plains, more emergency medical workers are now able to handle mishaps.

Nearly 20 first responders, from more than 10 counties, attended the March 22 safety workshop sponsored by the research center, the Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension Program and the Sumter County Farm Bureau.

The safety workshop was the first such event coordinated by the three agencies.

During the three-hour workshop participants learned how to assess emergency situations, deal with emotional family members and stabilize equipment when someone is trapped.

"Farm equipment can be so different from what you experience normally," said workshop presenter Dr. Glen C. Rains, an associate professor at the University of Georgia's Biological and Agricultural Engineering Department. "It's a really different situation, but if you know the steps to take you can alleviate some of the anxiety."

After his presentation Rains took participants outside to examine several pieces of farm equipment set up in a small open field. The professor showed the class how to turn off the equipment and the possible ways people can become caught in the machinery.

Rains also explained the importance of becoming familiar with the equipment and knowing what to do when arriving on an emergency scene.

The first step is turning off the equipment, Rains explained, which can be difficult if it has rolled over or someone is lying on the controls.

"You can learn about machinery extrication in the classroom," said Julia Snipes, the FVSU extension agent in Sumter County. "But until you can go out there and get your hands dirty, you can't get familiar with the equipment."

Snipes teamed up with Robin Alford of the Sumter County Farm Bureau and Stan Jones from the research center to sponsor the event.

Tommy Phillips, an emergency medical service officer for Dooly County, said he enjoyed the workshop, particularly seeing the equipment up close. Although he works in a rural area, Phillips said he's not familiar with farming equipment.

"That machine, with all the spindles and moving parts, looks like it could be a real challenge," said Phillips, pointing to a cotton picker more than 10 feet tall.

Although he took a similar class several years ago, Phillip said it was good to get a refresher course.

Phillips said he plans to share the lessons taught at the workshop with his fellow officers, and hopes they will take a class of their own.

"I'd like to see all of our guys do something like this because you never know when you could run up on a situation," said Phillips, who's been a medical service officer for 28 years.

The participants were very enthusiastic about the training. Most indicated an interest in attending the advanced extrication class in Tifton during the fall, Snipes said.



Photo by Ayanna McPhail
Tommy Phillips (left), an emergency medical service officer for Dooly County, and Stan Jones (center), superintendent for the Southwest Georgia Research and Education Center, watch as Dr. Glen C. Rains, of the University of Georgia, explains how a body can get caught in farming equipment.