

Small Farm Quarterly Youth Pages



Exploring the Small Farm Dream With 4-H Career Explorations

By Alicia Keller, Corfu, NY

On June 27-29, 2006 hundreds of 4-H youth attended the NYS 4-H Career Explorations trip on the campus of Cornell University. I represented Genesee County as a "focus assistant" for the session called "Exploring the Small Farm Dream."

Our group consisted of 14 youth representatives and 5 adult volunteers. Two group coordinators from Cornell's Small Farms Program arranged an educational experience in which we had the opportunity to explore the lives of small farmers. The first day we heard six speakers, and the second day consisted of visits to four local farming operations. The final day consisted of debriefing and reflection on our own agricultural dreams and ambitions.

This issue of the SFQ Youth Pages features the reflections of our group members on what we saw and what we learned.



Our 3-day session on "Exploring the Small Farm Dream" began in the classroom, where we heard from resource people like Christy Marshall of USDA Farm Services Agency, and from young people like ourselves who are already farming or thinking about farming.

Refining My Small Farm Dream

By Molly Edwards, Putnam Valley, NY

Ever since I can remember I have entertained the idea of having a small farm when I grow older. I haven't grown up on a farm, though I was in a 4-H club for a time that was based at a farm. I recently joined a small organic farm/ food co-op where we plant, take care of, and harvest a multitude of varieties of vegetables, from the 50 different kinds of lettuce to Asian greens to corn and pumpkins.

I also learned that there were a lot of directions you could go if you choose to run a farm. We visited ZiemBarbWay Farm that is actually a boarding house for cows and specializes in embryo transfers. We toured Hillcrest Dairy, a family-owned processing plant which takes the milk from their cows and sells it or turns it into cheese. Yet another farmer chose to open a restaurant that uses the organic fruits and vegetables that he grows.

no idea what a farmer's life was really like, and this program has given me a good view

of that life and helped me decide about my future.



Chris and Kim Grant of Indian Chimney Farm explained the challenges and rewards of running a small agritourism operation.

Traveling Through the Minds of Small Farms

By Samantha VanAlstine, Springfield, NY

For the past few days, I have spent time at Cornell University with students from many counties in a program on Exploring the Small Farm Dream. All of these presenters had very interesting, surprising and strange information to say and I think that anyway it was said; we all learned something different from it.

Several of the farmers told us that if you

want to succeed and you try hard, and you love what you do, you can do it. We learned that there are many different ways you can succeed on a farm, such as Elderberry Pond Farm which has their own restaurant and grows their own fruits and vegetables.

In this program, I have learned many new ways to succeed in farming. There are many people out there that will help you if you just ask for it.

My Own Small Farm Dream

By Elizabeth Trombly, Chateaugay, NY

My father owns a cash crop farm and we have a small barn for our animals. We started out with just two horses, and now we have seven heifers and one cow. I won the cow through the NYS Guernsey calf scholarship program, in May she had a set of twin girls.

While here at Cornell I was able to discover some new aspects of small farming. One of farms we visited was ZiemBarbWay farm of Aurora, NY. Here the owners board and raise dairy cattle for other people. The special part of the farm is that every cow is worth \$20,000 or more. Along with boarding, they also do embryo transfers on most of the animals. Both

the husband and wife graduated from Cornell University. The husband has a degree dealing with dairy genetics; this was something new that has sparked an interest in possible degree choices for me.

Some day after college I myself plan on having a small farm (less than 50 head of cattle), along with a second job. My experience over this time has allowed me to see and hear the point of views from many farmers. Though they all say that it's very hard work, they all agree that they couldn't see themselves doing anything else and that they have a great passion for their lifestyle. This program has only encouraged me and has given me new connections to fulfill my own small farm dream.



Lou Lego explains apple pest management strategies at Elderberry Pond Farm.

However, this small farm is extremely different from the farms that our group visited during Career Explorations. My small experience in farming didn't prepare me for what I saw and learned during my stay at Cornell. I knew farming was a tremendously difficult way of life, but I had no idea just how hard it actually was. One farmer we met said that he still had a couple of years to go until he broke even.

I have decided that, after touring the farms and talking to people in my group that live on farms, I will still have a small farm when I grow older, but it will most likely be smaller than what I would like and would probably be a hobby farm, not a full working farm. By taking part in Career Explorations this year, I have definitely gained a whole new level of respect for people who run any farm small or large. I had



Hillcrest Dairy showed us the whole plant where they make cheese and bottle their own milk.