

Planting seeds of knowledge

By: MANASEE WAGH
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Third grade students from Clara Barton Elementary School in Bristol Township learn the tricks of the trade from farm instructor Toria Harr while visiting Snipes Farm in Morrisville Tuesday. The field trip is one of several trips to the farm for the students so that they can see farm life in different seasons. Kim Weimer/staff photographer

In addition to working with school groups, this summer Snipes Farm will offer educational camps for kids ages 3 to 14.

Third-graders from Bristol Township got their hands dirty this week when they planted their own food.

About a month ago, the dozens of heads of lettuce, chives and Swiss chard were just seeds that they'd pressed into soil trays. Now the 70 Clara Barton Elementary School students have embedded the sprouting greens in a new home: freshly tilled soil beds.

Spending the day at Snipes Farm in Falls was part of a series of hands-on lessons about sustainable agriculture, and one of many educational activities the farm offers.

"OK, put your problem-solving hats on. We're going to need to plant in straight rows," said farm educator Toria Harr, dressed in overalls and boots.

She taught them a song to help them remember to plant straight and deep, and showed them how to put stakes in the ground at either end of a soil bed so they could make a straight line.

She then used a dibbler, a tool that makes holes about one foot apart as it's rolled along the dirt.

The kids took squares of rich dark soil in which their greens were sprouting, and placed them carefully into the holes.

"I like putting my hands in the soil," several students piped up, as they pulled errant roots and weeds out.

"I like that you can plant another plant for the Earth," said Niyaana Tyson-Thomas, patting soil around the roots of baby lettuce leaves.

In May, the kids will return to harvest and cook the plants into something delicious at the farm's outdoor kitchen.

The farm is working with several schools in the area, including five elementary schools from Bristol Township.

"We really like to get children involved with the growing season, to see each step of the process," said farmer Susan Snipes-Wells.

10th-generation farmers

Snipes-Wells and brother Jonathan Snipes belong to the 10th generation of the Snipes farming family. They have refused buyout offers to continue operating the 150-acre farm despite sprawling development on all sides.

For years, the Snipes have been educating area children about farming and natural foods.

The Snipes Farm and Education Center was established nearly two years ago as a 501c3 nonprofit. It has recently expanded to include the 25-acre Farm School at Snipes, which aims to teach sustainable farming and reconnect people to the land. Families can pick apples, pumpkins and berries, observe animals such as turkeys and peacocks, navigate a corn maze in the fall and take hayrides.

The community-supported agricultural farm grows more than 60 varieties of fruits and vegetables from spring through fall.

This summer, educational camps are coming up in June and July for kids ages 3 through 14. Four different programs will allow children to explore the farm, learn how food grows, make arts and crafts and eat healthy snacks made from fresh farm produce.

"It's such an exciting experience. We go to the classroom first and give them a lesson about planting and farming. Then they come out and mulch and feed the roots and trees, and learn what it takes for a seed to grow. Next time, we'll teach the kids about nutrition and whole foods cooking," said Snipes-Wells.

This week, the children also dissected flowers and watched bees pollinate the apple orchard. They discovered what the insides of an earthworm look like thanks to a poster diagram. As dozens of worms crawled through dirt placed in bowls set on picnic tables, kids picked them up and examined them more closely.

Melanie Douty-Snipes, director of education at the farm, told the children that worms help farmers greatly by mixing organic matter and recycling nutrients in soil.

"If you take anything away from this lesson today, I hope you always remember that worms are amazing," she said.

Snipes Farm and education summer camps

For more information and to register, go to www.snipesfarm.org

or call the farm at 215-295-1139. Snipes Farm is at 890 West Bridge St., Falls.

Little Sprouts

Ages 3-5, 10 a.m.-noon on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in July

Hands-on farm lessons, art projects, stories and farm fresh snacks. Choose from 12 classes, each with a different farm and nature theme.

\$20 per class (sibling discounts available)

Farm and Arts Camp

Ages 6-8, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. from June 21-25

Ages 9-11, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. from July 5-9

Learn how crops grow from seed to plant. Help plant, tend and harvest them, then turn them into healthy treats. Join in craft projects using materials found on the farm. Weave original creations with natural fibers and make masks and puppets out of recycled and natural materials.

\$225 (includes material fees)

FARM AND SCIENCE CAMP

Ages 6-8, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. from June 28-July 2

Ages 9-11, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. from July 12-16

Learn about farms from the inside out. There are plant-eating bugs and bug-eating plants and a whole underground world of worms. Find out why it takes five months to grow a tomato. Be a part of the Veggie Olympics from greenhouse to field to the lunch table. Explore a farm like a scientist.

\$225 (includes material fees)

FUTURE FARMERS

Ages 12-14, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. from July 19-23

Spend a week on the farm working and learning from farmers how to grow food and how to tend animals. Work on a farm construction project and cook delicious snacks every day from farm fresh ingredients.

\$225 (includes material fees)

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