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Ag teaching goes to the country

By Dick Hagen

On Wednesday, May 6, Ag in the Classroom provided a huge dose of reality to 80, 3rd grade students of Redwood Valley Public School. These 80 kids along with 5 of their class room teachers and 5 Para-professional classroom assistants hopped on two school buses Wednesday morning and by the time they got back to school Wednesday afternoon they had:

- a) Participated in a 1-hour walking tour at Revier Cattle Company south of Olivia, (one of Minnesota's largest feedlots),
- b) Munched through a sit-down snack lunch session at the Renville Community Center where Mel Stocks, President, MinAqua Fisheries, told them about the 1.2 million lbs of tilapia fish this cooperative produces each year, and
- c) Enjoyed at the Renville City Park the unique experience of making their own special treats of butter, ice cream and Soy Boys, a special necklace that grows as you wear it.

Third grader Sarah Heiderscheidt perhaps spoke for all her classmates when she joyfully exclaimed, "This was the best field trip ever. I hope we do this again next year."

Jenny Bloedow, 29 years of teaching and raised on a dairy farm commented, "Most of these kids are seeing and experiencing things they have never seen before. Even though we think of Redwood Valley as being a 'rural Minnesota' school area, only 4 or 5 of our kids live on farms. So most of our students just don't have much connection with agriculture."

But connect they did on May 6. At the Revier Cattle Company for example Tom Revier, father of two young children, explained to the kids that his cattle walk on concrete walkways to keep their yard clean "...just like you kids have hallways to walk between classes." And when showing the 3rd graders the huge bunker silos filled with earlage (chopped ear corn silage), haylage, and even a bunker for DDG feeds (wet mash from ethanol plants) he told his curious audience, "You kids may not like the smell of this stuff but my cattle love it. To them it's like eating a chocolate sundae."

The kids chuckled with that idea, but when Mr. Revier said they could pick up a handful of the DDG feed two things happened: most kids pinched their noses, and most said something like, "yuk, this stuff really stinks."

Walking the concrete walkways between pens, the kids observed the frolicking reaction of the cattle when a huge bale of corn stalk bedding was dumped into one of the pens. Feedlot Manager Doug Scheibel told the kids, "See how the cattle enjoy this. Its sort of like you kids getting permission to jump on your beds. Cattle like to have fun too."

Tom explained that cattle are curious, sort of like Curious George, the cartoon character. "If there were just a couple of you kids next to a pen, the cattle would likely come up and lick your hand. But not to taste it, they're just curious about what you are."

Even the importance of arithmetic was emphasized to the kids. He told of two new beef barns to be built this summer and asked the kids, "When you play in your own sandbox aren't you often building something from the sand? In farming math is really important because we are often figuring what size pens we need for certain cattle, and how much feed do we need to finish out this pen of cattle."