



Berlin Journal Article

Berlin Area School District

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Topic: Future Farmers of America

The City of Berlin and the surrounding area has a long, proud history of farming, from its fur and trapping days, to the first commercial cranberry harvesting in Wisconsin, all the way to modernized dairy and cash crop agriculture. Over the years the Berlin High School has played an important role in agricultural education and the development of leadership among our youth, whether they are current or future farmers, or they have an interest in animal science or horticulture.

Each year in February a week is designated by bipartisan decree as National Future Farmers of America (FFA) Week, providing a venue for the FFA to celebrate their work in developing our youth and promoting the values of agriculture. The FFA organization works to develop leadership and career success, develop personal growth, make a positive difference in the lives of others, encourage dressing appropriately for the occasion, respect the rights of others and property, and being courteous, honest, and fair. It is hard to argue that an organization that helps our youth take on these traits, develop leadership skills, and encourage a strong sense of the value of agriculture isn't altogether a good thing for our community.

This year the Berlin Area School District hired Melissa Remer, our new agriculture teacher and FFA advisor. This is Melissa's first year teaching, but you would never know it when you visit her room or hear her talk about her teaching and passion for agriculture. Melissa grew up on a farm in Omro with her family. Her family originally raised cattle, then switched to cash crops. She now farms with her fiancé in Pickett, WI. Besides advising FFA, Melissa teaches Intro to Agriculture, Animal Science 1 and 2, Horticulture, and Food Science. She would like to expand course offerings to include the natural resources side of agriculture and taxidermy.

Melissa understands that agriculture is important for everyone, not just as a source of food, but as a way of understanding the world around us. It is important to learn where food comes from and the science and ecology behind it. Melissa recognizes that the technology behind farming has come a long way and many people are in the dark about these changes. She is passionate that our youth need to understand these changes and become leaders in the future of agriculture.

Sometimes students still think of farmers in the old stereotypical way of the farmer wearing overalls and using simple, traditional techniques. While farmers continue to work hard, often



long hours, and their jobs involve getting their hands dirty, agriculture also includes drones, GPS devices, computers, and a lot of high tech. Melissa loves opening the minds of our students to see how technology has led to continued growth in per acre outputs, despite a shrinking number of family farms and cultivated land.

The Future Farmers of America (FFA) is a national organization with chapters in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. It has more than 760,000 members making it the largest youth-led organization in the country. The Berlin High School chapter of FFA has over 35 active members who organize activities such as the Farm to Table Breakfast, dress-up days, and a Kiss the Calf event, to name a few. This year members of FFA were able to attend the FFA National Convention in Indianapolis, IN to network with other students from across the country, learn from each other, hear from experts in the field, and develop their leadership skills.

Last year some members of the FFA took a ten day tour of Europe to better learn about agriculture and food production practices in Europe including rooftop farming in urban settings, mass production of tulips, in Holland, and chocolate production in Belgium, among other things. The trip provided an important opportunity for some of our youth to look beyond our community to see the world beyond our area and learn about the possibilities in agriculture. Hopefully, this not only expands their minds, but some of their learning might be brought back to Berlin to grow our agricultural business.

The Berlin Area School District provides much more than reading, writing, and math, which are all necessary and important for our students to learn and grow. The district also provides a wide range of course offerings and youth leadership development opportunities, as exemplified by the FFA. Melissa Remer and our other fantastic staff work diligently and enthusiastically every day to help our students grow and expand their minds. Next time you run into one of our students from the FFA, ask them about what they are learning. They would love to tell you all about it.