



LEADERship Ashtabula County Completes 30th Agriculture Day

ASHTABULA COUNTY - LEADERship Ashtabula County's Signature Class spent Wednesday, November 14, exploring agriculture in its many forms around the county.

Ashtabula County boasts 1,099 farms covering 165,967 acres that together make agriculture the number one driver of employment and number two in the county in terms of economic engines.

Guiding this year's 32 LEADERship Ashtabula County Signature class members was veteran Agriculture Day chair, Nathan Paskey, who welcomed class members to South River Winery for an early morning presentation about the glacial formation and its impact on the agriculture and geography of our region.

Paskey (LEADERship Class of 1994), manager of the Ashtabula County Soil and Water Conservation District, has presented to every LEADERship class throughout the organization's 30 year history, with the inaugural year being the only exception.

The group was also joined by OSU Extension office Agriculture and Natural Resource education officer, Andrew Holden, who presented a wealth of information to the class regarding our region's most bountiful crops and value-added products like cheese, wine, maple syrup, miscanthus products and more.

The day included a stop at Magyar Farms in Orwell where the class was able to learn more about the farm's 102 year history and how adapting to change and being flexible has kept the family operation relevant and successful. Farm owner Jeff Magyar and his daughter Rebecca explained the various operations of not only their own corn and soybean operations but also the drying and storage operations they offer to other growers and producers in the area.

The second stop of the day for the class was Comp Dairy Farm in Dorset where farm owners Jim and Sherry Comp welcomed the LEADERship class with open arms and packets of treats and information about dairy farming.

The Comp Dairy farm family, which employs many full and part time team members as well, plus 1162 milking cows and another 1200 to 1300 replacement cows at any given time, provided a wealth of information. From farm history, the industry news and challenges, to bottle

feeding calves and learning how to line up and attach their cows to the automatic milking machines, class members were exposed to all facets of life on the dairy farm.

LEADERSHIP class member and Junior Achievement Director, Patty Stone noted her sense of awe at the loyalty she witnessed at the dairy farm.

“I was impressed with the loyalty of the employees and the readiness of the owners to call the employees ‘family’. The pride in how they ran the business and cared for the cows was even reflected in the sharing of the goody bags and printouts they had assembled for all of us,” Stone said. “The passion the family and employees had for the business and the willingness to share was infectious.”

Paskey also has a desired takeaway from each Agriculture day he helps to organize. He says he hopes that people “realize the dedication and passion it means to be a farmer and to be in this industry,” he said. “And also for people to realize that these are well educated business people and while they may not be producing a piece of plastic or a car part, those items have a lot fewer variables than the animals that they have to deal with.”

Continuing on, the group traveled to Bissell Maple Farm in Jefferson, Ohio where they toured the facility, tasted some syrup and enjoyed lunch from Crosswinds Grille where chef Nate Fagnilli provided locally sourced beef and chicken options and delicious macaroni and cheese that was perfect for warming up on the cold Northeast Ohio Fall day.

Nathan Bissell offered the class a tour of the facility and astounded the gathering with some impressive numbers. He lavished his crew of dedicated employees with compliments as they had just that morning completed a project that included packaging an amazing 449,064 bottles of maple syrup.

Bissell’s message throughout the tour included one of what he hopes to sell people who buy their products. He continually went back to the experience that their products bring to a customer.

“Why do we make syrup? We do this to provide an experience, to be together with family and to hopefully bottle that experience,” Bissell said. “We aren’t selling a bottle of syrup, we are selling memories. That’s what we hope to do.”

Bissell also emphasized what drives him, personally, in terms of the maple business. He spoke about the disappearance of the Bissell family apple orchard that once existed and missing those times working with family. “Family was around and it was an experience,” Bissell said. “That’s why we do what we do; to preserve tradition.”

The class continued on to Brant's Apple Orchard where owner Brian Diehl (LEADERship Class of 2009) described the history of the orchard up through his family's purchase 4 years ago and on to the amazing growth the orchard has seen under the Diehl family's watchful eye.

Continuing on with the theme heard at other facilities that day, Diehl credited his knowledgeable orchard managers and dedicated staff with the success they've seen as an eco-tourism destination and is excited to welcome many new events and weddings to the location next year.

The day concluded at Red Eagle Distillery in Geneva with a presentation by distillery and South River Winery owner Gene Sigel.

Sigel conveyed the story of the two establishments and explained the process the distillery has undertaken to use locally sourced grains for their spirits since they began distilling in 2012.

In reflection about the day, Paskey noted he heard a comment on the group's bus at one point where someone exclaimed with astonishment at the realization that "my goodness, this is a multimillion dollar business!"

Paskey commented that part of the day for him is helping people realize that these farms are part of our local job and economy landscape and "to realize it takes dedication and passion to work these multimillion dollar businesses, 24/7, 365 days a year, with very little in way of returns," he said. "I always ask them if they would do it again, these folks know all about hardships and still they say they wouldn't have done it any other way."

For more information about LEADERship Ashtabula County, please visit <http://www.leadershipac.org>

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