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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Bedford 4-H Campers See Agriculture is A Way of Life**

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For many children in Bedford County, summer does not only mean no school- it means it's time for 4-H camp. For Bedford County, this happens each year during a specified week at W.E. Skelton 4-H Center at Smith Mountain Lake with the Bedford and Pittsylvania Extension Offices and many teen and adult volunteers who donate their week to being with the kids. 4-H strives to assist youth develop into self-directing, contributing and productive members of society with the motto to "learn by doing." Camp is used as a vehicle for this mission to allow kids between the ages of 9-13 to experience nature, community, leadership and life.



For me, my first 4-H camp experience was as a 20 year old college student... let's just say, I wasn't the average first time camp-goer. As an intern for the Cooperative Extension Office in Bedford County, it was agreed that I would teach a class called "All about Ag" during this year's camp which was held June 22-26. The goal was to teach campers about agriculture and help them realize that agriculture is a lot more than a farm. Agriculture is a way of life, essentially affecting every part of how we live. Too often, agriculture is simplified and reduced to a narrow concept of a farmer with his/her crops and livestock. However, agriculture extends that view in so many ways, affecting culture, eating and living habits to even women's rights.

4-H campers gather with Smokey Bear and Virginia Deputy Regional Forester Chris Thomsen

Surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains, Smith Mountain Lake and all the life and farms in between, we could not have had a more perfect setting to begin talking about agriculture. From learning about animal science, including its many by-products; to connecting the farm to the dinner table; to having a visit from Smokey Bear and learning about trees; all week the campers related agriculture to their own lives. As a result, they

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began to see that agriculture is intertwined throughout their lives in the food they eat, the clothes they wear and many of the products they use on a daily basis.

On the final day of classes, after recognizing that farming is a lot more than overalls and a pickup truck, the campers wrote thank you notes to local farmers to be given and shared through the Bedford County Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board. Some of their words are below:

- “Thank you for all you provide for me. I really appreciate the clothes I have, the food I eat, the oxygen, clean water, etc....”
- “...I also want to say sorry for the people who do not believe farmers are important, but still, thank you for making our country stay alive”
- “You are so awesome to help the world be a better place. You probably farm because you love it! Thank you so much...”
- “...Milk is the bestest drink in the world. I like it a lot. Tell your cows thanks too”
- “Thank you for all your fruits and vegetables. Even though I don’t really like vegetables, but I’m working on eating vegetables...You guys are the heroes now”
- “I know you probably don’t get the recognition that you deserve but you are amazing at your job... Please keep doing what you’re doing because without you the world would turn upside down!”

Words do not begin to explain how much of a privilege it was to go to 4-H camp; I was welcomed with open arms from the campers, teen counselors, adult volunteers and extension staff. I now know that “Are you enthusiastic?”, a popular rallying cry all week at 4-H camp, does not have a simple yes or no answer. I also know I want to stay involved with 4-H in the future because it and those kids are truly amazing.

For more information about Bedford 4-H programs, please contact the Bedford Extension Office at 540-586-7675.

*If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Scott Baker of the Bedford Extension Office at (540)586-7675 [TDD: (800)828-1120] during business hours of 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.*