

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 10, 2010

Agriculture Program at Ponderosa High School Showcases Students' Talents

Agriculture constitutes a significant portion of El Dorado County's economic base and includes the growing of grapes and apples among its highest commodities as well the pasturelands for which account for the largest land use in the county.

As a result, it makes sense that a strong Agriculture program at Ponderosa High School provide the basis for educating our students who are the future of this ever-growing industry.

The Agriculture program at Ponderosa is a complex, highly technical, and multi-layered program that offers a rigorous curriculum spanning an array of courses. The program has shown remarkable enthusiasm among its student population, increasing its enrollment from 150 students in 2007 to 222 dedicated students this past school year. When freshmen enter the Ag program they are introduced to an overview of all aspects of the Ag industry. As sophomores, they progress to more technical aspects of the science of Agriculture, and as juniors and seniors take a variation of courses based on their career pathway.

Depending on a student's interest, they can opt for Floral and Landscape Design classes to learn about the theory and principles of artistic design coupled with practical skills; or Agriculture Science which touches on plant and animal science, agriculture business, California agriculture, and leadership; or Agricultural Biology, a 1-year laboratory science course to learn about the molecular and cellular aspects of life, growth, reproduction, and evolution, among other aspects; or Ornamental Horticulture where students learn the science and skills involved in propagation, managing, and marketing ornamental crops; and further; or, finally, Animal Science which expands on the scientific concepts related to animals. The program also offers numerous experience projects that further refine student knowledge and enhance student skills while providing them with relevant experience.

The Ag program centers around three areas: classroom instruction, leadership through the affiliation with the Future Farmers of America (FFA), and the student Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) projects, working closely with advisors on their future goals. Each of these areas is integral to the program. Each student is required to keep records in their FFA Record Book. Students, too, learn about the business aspect, such as profit and loss, net worth, depreciable inventory, and more.

The program incorporates hands-on activities, or SAE projects, into the curriculum wherever possible. For example, Animal Science students have conducted their own feed trail using pigs, charting a comparison of the animals' growth, development, and health using two different

commercial feeds. In Floral Design, students work on a weekly basis learning style and selling their product. Students also participate in work days at the school farm laboratory, and assist with landscaping, mechanics, and maintenance of the facility. Students in Ag Science and Ag Biology participate in seed trails in the school's greenhouse and learn to market and sell their products. Students learn about the body systems of livestock as well as how to breed, manage, process, and rear young livestock as well as vaccinate, shear, groom, and feed these livestock. Students also learn to install, fertilize, and prune fruit trees in the campus mini orchard.

Relevant experiential learning also includes field trips to local Ag industry sites to help prune orchards or to vaccinate and hoof trim livestock. Students also participate at the county and state fairs, Forestry Challenge, and agriculture skill-based events. They also attend a number of conferences and leadership events which further support their knowledge-base and experiences as well as familiarize them with additional skills in public speaking and job interviewing.

The Ponderosa Ag program has also produced a number of students who have been recognized for their talents. Sara Arsenault, a senior next year, exhibited her leadership skills to become the school's first Regional FFA officer this past year and plans to apply for state FFA Office next year. Ponderosa students have also been highly successful in competitions and exhibitions. The Ag program's specialty/small animal vet tech team won second overall last year in the state competition. The horse judging team has been as high as fourth place in the state at various competitions this year. And, the forestry team placed first at the CA Forestry Challenge over the past two years. Senior Rachel Bacchi was the regional FFA Proficiency finalist in the area of diversified livestock production, and nine students this year received their state FFA degree earning \$1,000 in their project area serving their community for a minimum of 20 hours, and being involved in many FFA and school activities.

Once students have gone through this intensive educational program, learned specific skills tailored to their field of concentration, where do they go once they've graduated. Graduate Courtney Lund will go to Tarleton State next year to pursue a pre-vet degree; Lisa Beach has received a scholarship to Fresno State to ride with their Division 1 Equestrian Team and will pursue a degree in animal nutrition. Nicole Duncan is employed at Lees Feed and has been promoted to manager. Stephanie Bevier will graduate this year from Cal Poly with a degree in Ag Engineering. There are a host of successful stories like these from numerous Ponderosa graduates. This terrific program is set up to guide each student, but inventively each student carves his/her own path through the program tailored specifically for their future—and what a bright future they have with the educational opportunities available to them!

The success of the Ag program at Ponderosa is partly due to its dedicated teacher Lindsey Kovach. Lindsey has been a teacher at Ponderosa for 3 years. Her degree is in Agricultural Science with a concentration in horticulture. Like many of her students, Lindsey was also a member of the local 4-H from a very young age. She showed in the El Dorado County Fair from age 9 to 18 and raised market and breeding swine and rabbits. She also worked as the South Coast region FFA Intern during her college years, and as a nurse at a small animal vet clinic, and as a nursery sales person at a local farm supply store.

Lindsey is so proud of her students for taking advantage of the opportunities provided to them in the Ag program and the FFA and with how well they excel beyond high school. She notes, "I am fortunate to work with such amazingly driven students. Through our program and the activities offered through FFA, I am able to watch these students accomplish great things on a daily basis. Our program has something for every student. Helping each student grow and watching them succeed within their area of interest is a great perk to being an agricultural instructor."