



Views from VanDeWalle

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An Extension Intern's Reflection

This week, I have a guest columnist who has been an integral part of the summer 4-H program for the past three years. Alexis Schmidt, has been working at the extension office as a summer aide/intern and been a huge asset to the 4-H county program so I decided to share some of her experiences before she goes to college. Alexis writes:

I have been a part of the Fillmore County 4-H program for 9 years now. As a 4-H'er you don't see what truly happens at the County Fair. I have had the great opportunity to experience both sides. For the last three summers I have worked as a summer aide. I started this job when I was heading into my junior year of high school. That previous February I had to undergo knee surgery. This surgery put my athletic career on hold. What does a high school athlete do when she can't do what she's known all of her life? I had many options such as sitting around and moping around about it. This is not the way that I live my life though.

I decided that I was going to find a job. I remembered the Extension Office having a summer aide, and I enjoy helping younger kids develop 4-H projects. I decided that I would apply for the position. Now, as a sixteen year old I didn't have much experience filling out a job application or even a job interview. So right off the bat this job has given me lessons for the future. A couple days later I received a phone call saying that I was hired for the job and that I would be serving as a summer aide/office manager. This office manager part of the position scared me quite a bit. I was a sixteen year old trying to take a key role at the Extension Office.

I finished school and a couple days later I started training for this position. Let me tell you there was a lot of information that was thrown at me, and I was very overwhelmed, but I made it though! I am sure there were mistakes that I made and didn't hear about especially on the livestock and financial side of things. If you know me you know that my family doesn't raise livestock. I knew there were shows at the County Fair, but didn't really pay attention to them because I was a kid who exhibited static exhibits. This threw me for a loop because people were asking me livestock questions and I didn't know the answers. We made it through the County Fair successfully though. This experience is not forgotten though. I experienced my first fair from the other side. The other side meaning setting up Ag Hall for fair, listening to concerns in the livestock barns, and continuously checking on the Food Stand to make sure things were run smoothly. I would have never thought about the amount of work put into such a week.

I had the opportunity to come back for a second year. This year was much different as Holly, our office manager, was not on maternity leave. I spent most of the summer seeing the complete other side of the Extension office. For example, I went to my first Excellences in Ag Sciences Day, which is a day where teachers see curriculum that the University is developing. The topic was about horticulture and landscape. I would have never thought about what neat things teachers could incorporate into their lesson plans to help students understand what is

going on in the horticulture industry. Then, I was fortunate enough to plan and execute my own workshop for 4-Hers. This experience was tied into my Supervised Agriculture Experience for FFA so I had to tie it into agriculture. How was I going to tie agriculture into a cupcake-decorating workshop? That's a great question, but I ended up asking kids where the ingredients of cupcakes came from. You would be shocked at some of the responses I received. After the discussion, we spent time making a project that they could take to the fair. There's that word again, fair! Fair was soon coming and many hours of prep and figuring out how to make it run as smoothly as possible both for static exhibits and livestock exhibits. I was able to experience what it was like to run the livestock shows. It was quite different for this "indoor kid."

Finally came year three. This year I have had the great opportunity to be in a routine from last year as far as preparing for Excellences in Ag Sciences Day, Ag Safety Day, my own workshops, and fair. I was able to relax a little bit more and have some fun with the year. I have learned a lot about crops and agronomy this year. On a Monday I brought in one of my crops from our farm, and we dissected it to see the different parts of the plant. We were fortunate enough to see the tassel just forming! This experience as well as the many trips to fields for soil samples or the Friday morning ET gage check has helped me develop a great passion for agronomy and what is going on with our crops. Later in the summer, came fair. I can remember showing up to the horse show wondering what we were forgetting because everything was so well organized and run. I had that thought run through my mind many times throughout the week but I never heard anything too major. This year I spent even more time out in the livestock area and I was finally told that I couldn't classify myself as an "indoor kid" anymore because of the knowledge that I knew about running the shows and the time that I spent out in the barns.

That leads me to where I am now. This job has provided me many great experiences and memories that I will cherish forever. I have met many people in Extension as well as many of the 4-H families that make Fillmore County's 4-H program so strong. I have developed a great passion of helping 4-Hers and their families learn and grow in the agriculture industry. Working at the Extension Office has also helped me choose a major in Agriculture Education. I am thankful for the amazing staff I get to work with and that they didn't shun me when I decided to not go to the University of Nebraska.

Alexis will be attending South Dakota State University and serve as a member of the track team throwing discus and shotput. I wish her well and know she will be successful in all of her endeavors!