

FFA Bridging Connections for Students

An Interview with Emma Heiden & Hannah Highum

How did the Learning Plot start? What keeps it going every year?

Hannah: Years ago, old FFA members bought the plot. Seed was donated and trials were done and it's continued ever since. Every year we get help from community members & FFA members who donate a lot of time and support us through their enthusiasm. Preston Farm & Dairy has also donated their time in supporting us and the learning plot.

What is planted in the Learning Plot? Why did you choose this?

Emma: We planted corn. We chose corn because of the rotation schedule with beans that we've done in the past and this way we can keep more nutrients in the soil.

How was the plot planted?

Hannah: A local farmer helps us plant and harvest the 30 acres every year.

Have any conservation practices been used in the learning plot?

Emma: Nitrogen stabilizers have been used in partnership with the local co-op to make sure nitrogen stays in the soil.

Are there any additional conservation practices that could be possible with the plot?

Emma: Cover Crops. We'd like to see what they might do and if it's more time consuming than beneficial.

What are some hurdles to implementing these additional practices?

Emma: Finding people to help with cover crops and the time to implement the practice.

What are some benefits of the above-named conservation practices?

Hannah: The cover crops would potentially protect the soil and hold in nutrients.

What new skills have you learned from planting the learning plot?

Hannah: I learned a lot more about crops and managing a field along with what is put on a field. The co-op has been a great learning source for us.

Emma: The leadership opportunities have been so great and so has been networking and connecting on a different level, more as a business and less as a student.

Why has the Co-op been a great learning source?

Hannah: The co-op has been very cooperative with any questions we have asked them and they have been able to teach us about all the different things that go on a field and what they are good for.

What have you put on the field?

Hannah: On the field we have DAP, Red Potash, Urea, and AMS Bulk.

When will the plot be harvested and what will be done with the crop?

Hannah: Harvest will take place in the fall as soon as it is ready. Once harvested we will sell it to the co-op. Profit goes back into the plot but because so much is donated to the plot, the profit usually goes towards other FFA activities, like state or nationals.

Is there any way of estimating yields before harvest?

Emma: YES! My dad taught me this! To estimate yield, count a row of kernels up and a row around the cob. It will ALWAYS be even. We have 36 up the row and 14 around. To find the estimated yield we have to do some math. 36 kernels up and 14 around would be $36 \times 14 = 504$. 504 is then X by 34,000 which is the average cob/acre, that number is then divided by 80,000, as that is the average kernels a bushel. So, our math problem looks like this $36 \times 14 = 504$. $504 \times 34,000 / 80,000 = 214.20$ for an average yield.

What has been the best part of this experience for you so far?

Hannah: Meeting everyone in the co-ops and learning in the field.

Emma: I feel the same and just opportunities like learning how to calculate corn yields.

What are future plans for the Learning Plot? Any way to improve the learning opportunities with the plot?

Emma: FFA members haven't been involved as much in past years and advisors have done it just because there hasn't been much interest. Hanna and I would like to get younger kids involved and make sure everyone knows we have it and get it in the classroom more.

What are some ways you can get younger kids involved in FFA? How many students are in FFA now?

Hannah: We are trying different activities that hopefully boost the kids's interest in FFA. We have monthly meetings and encourage them to come and we are willing to help with any CDE events they want to join. A lot of kids believe FFA is only farm kids so they don't feel like joining, they are also involved in many other activities and don't seem to have time for FFA. I believe there are 30-40 students in FFA.

What is the greatest skill FFA has given you besides general Ag knowledge?

Hannah: There isn't one single skill FFA has given me. It has given me confidence, better public speaking skills, leaderships skills, communication skills and much more. It has been a great opportunity with all of the people that I have met and the friendships I have made will be long lasting. In FFA you are able to meet people with the same interests as you and it is very easy to connect with those people. The SAE contest we go to is always fun and definitely worth going to.

What are some of your future plans that will benefit from your experience with the Learning Plot?

Hannah: I think both of our goals are to go into a farming career. This will help us know more about the field and how to manage one.

Emma: Definitely helpful when it comes to learning about farming and we hope the Learning Plot will continue on with more interest year after year. We've just been really grateful for all the opportunities it's given us and grateful for everyone who has helped and supported us.

After talking with Emma and Hannah, we decided to go out to the Learning Plot and take a few pictures. As we were getting up from our seats in Subway, a few older gentlemen stopped the girls and started asking them questions about the half ears of corn each girl was holding. The girls then proceeded to give another lesson in yield estimation, talk about their time at the State Fair and other things they have been doing in FFA. The men were so supportive and proud that these two young girls from their community wanted to be involved in Ag and farming. It really connected the appreciation the girls have for the community support, and the appreciation the community has for young people who want to stay true to their roots.

