4-H Tractor Club Tours Pennsylvania

The Southwest Virginia 4-H Tractor Club recently spent a fun and lesson-filled trip to south central Pennsylvania. The trip has been over a year in the making mostly due to their leader’s foot surgery issues from late 2022 and 2023, but like anything in the shop, a little patience and effort goes a long way.

The group totaling 17 members, parents and Extension Agents left Marion early Thursday morning on December 28 and headed north. Our first stop was the Shenandoah Valley Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC) also known as the home farm of Cyrus Hall McCormick, located in Raphine, VA.

The group embarked on a tour of the McCormick family shop which houses many of the early models of the McCormick Reaper, including a life-size model of the original reaper. They also toured the water-powered grist mill that sits adjacent to the shop.

The McCormick family donated the farm to Virginia Tech in 1954, and for the past 70 years the farm has not only had the role of being a historic landmark, but it also had been a source of many research-based projects. Currently, the farm is focused mainly on pasture research for beef cattle.

The club was treated to an excellent presentation by the farm staff about the research being carried out by the AREC. Not only was the research and data shared, but also the hardware and mechanical processes (including several invented there at the AREC) to collect and correlate the information.

Following a lunch break and refueling at White’s Truck Stop, the group proceeded north into the Lancaster area. Given the hour of our arrival, our first stop in Pennsylvania was the famous Shady Maple Smorgasbord in East Earl, PA. The Shady Maple is well-known for its vast amount of food choices, featuring many local favorites. Safe to say, no one left hungry.

The club stayed in nearby New Holland PA. Our hotel was within walking distance of the New Holland Farm Machinery’s Hay Making Equipment plant but being as it was the holidays and many in our group were underage, we only viewed the outside of the plant from a distance.

We did however have a great stop to begin Friday’s tours in Lancaster. The club toured Restoration Tractor Sales, owned by Mr. Jesse Stoltzfus. Like many of our members, Jesse grew up loving to turn wrenches on older equipment. He shared with the group that his father had a small fix-it shop and he and his brother purchased an old Cub Cadet lawn mower when he was 8 to fix up and resell.

Jesse and his brother cleared $60, which they split evenly, but that was the start of his business today. He spoke to the group about the importance of saving their money and being focused when the opportunity to purchase something came along. From that first lawn mower, he moved to more mowers, then antique tractors and finally to large modern tractors.

His business has grown enough that they recently purchased a new farm and facility to house the shop and parts storage, but they have already outgrown the building there. Concrete was being poured as we visited to make room for more expansion. Even though they had several projects and employees going, Jesse shared that the secret of growing a business was to start small and stay focused on your goals.

After thanking Jesse, sneaking in a quick bathroom break and reloading the vans, we headed towards the town of Lilitz PA and the main draw of the trip for the club members, Outback Toys. Many in the club had saved their Christmas money for this opportunity and Outback was thankful for our patronage.

Following a great lunch at a local pizza restaurant recommended to us by the Outback Toys staff, we headed south to Gettysburg for a brief visit to the National Military Park. As it was getting late in the day and bad weather was in the forecast, we departed for home and arrived back in Marion about 9 pm Friday night.

If you would like to join us as a member or volunteer, we’d love to have you. Simply call the Extension Office at (276) 780- 9486. We have a meeting coming up later this month, where we will elect officers and make plans for more fun and learning this spring and summer.

Upcoming Events

Jan 15 VQA Steer Take Up

Jan 17 VQA Heifer Take-Up

Jan 19-20 Sheep Basics Workshop, Begins 10 AM Friday, VT Copenhaver Sheep Center

Jan 23 VFGC Winter Conference, Wytheville Meeting Center, Registration at 8 am, Program 9-3

Jan 27 Beef Cattle Health Conference, Alphin Stuart Arena, VA Tech

Feb 9 Deadline to consign claves to the March VQA Sale

Feb 10 Forest Landowner Conference, Wytheville

Mar 19 VQA Sale

Mar 25 VQA Steer Take Up

Mar 27 VQA heifer Take Up

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at (276) 783-5175/TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.

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