

Animal farms

Agri-animals at Antioch College



By Terri Gordon

Animals figure big in three Yellow Springs enterprises—Antioch College’s farm, the Menagerie Ranch, and Young’s Jersey Dairy.

Antioch Farm

Antioch College has a long history as a traditional liberal arts college with sustainability as a prime tenet of its mission. How does a herd of sheep help them achieve this goal? The sheep are part of the college farm, and it’s a little complex, but they are there to work; save the college time, labor, and money; and later, provide food.

The Antioch Farm is one of the work programs every student is required to participate in. It is also a “learning lab.” And, it grows a portion of the school’s food.

Kat Christen, the farm’s only non-student staff member, coordinates its many activities. “[The farm] is really focused on student experience,” she says. “Students can come out

as part of their classes. They can volunteer on the farm. They can do independent projects on the farm. So there're a lot of ways students can be involved."

All the food grown on Antioch Farm goes into the college's dining program. Staff chefs are experts with local and seasonal cuisine and incorporate the farm's products into the menu, helping achieve the sustainability the college embraces. And, as Christen points out, "It's under 1,500 feet to get to the dining hall, as opposed to the average meal, which is 1,500 miles." Naturally, all scraps are composted and returned to the farm as rich soil enhancement.

"We grow a lot of annual crops," Christen says. "Our students particularly like tomatoes and colorful beans, and we grow a lot of kale, a lot of colored potatoes, garlic. Those kinds of things are in our annual garden. We also have a food forest, and in the food forest we have perennials, things that come back every year—herbs, shrubs, and berries."

There are also chickens and ducks for eggs—and, of course, the sheep.

While food is one way the farm helps with sustainability, the 4.6-acre solar array is another. The "solar farm" provides 30 percent of the college's energy and saves the school nearly a half million dollars annually. There is a problem, though: mowing. Solar panels are installed on raised frames. It is tricky to mow around and under them. This is where the sheep come in. Each spring the farm acquires a small flock of lambs that are left to graze the pasture that holds the solar panels. Since they are unnecessary in the winter, they are butchered in late fall and added to the dining program.

Visitors are welcome at the Antioch Farm, though Christen warns they are not very formal! There are no greeters, no guides. Still, there are paths to follow, and interested parties can meander the grounds as they please.

For more information, please call 937.477.8654 or visit AntiochCollege.edu/campus_life/Farm.