

DIGGING FOR WORMS!



PHOTOS BY JOHN FITTS

Gabriella Macias digs for worms.

"Farmer Sarah" (Sarah Strecker) proudly displays the worm she found.

Cherry Brook student Wesley Henne digs for worms in the compost pile at Bristol's Farm during a visit by the third-grade class to the farm. The field trip was the culmination in a program which taught the students about recycling, worms and a little about farming.

By John Fitts
Staff Writer

Chances are that few adults know what setae are and how they help earthworms. Before running to the dictionary or Internet to look up the word, however, simply find a young person that just finished the third grade at Cherry Brook Primary School. He or she should be able to help you with the definition.

That's because those students spent some time this past school year learning everything worms with the help of teachers at the school and Farmer Mark, a.k.a. Mark Palladino, who leases and operates Bristol Farm in Canton.

Cherry Brook third-graders learn about nature's recyclers

Palladino visited the school, talked about the anatomy of worms and helped the kids conduct experiments and build worm "homes." And near the end of the school year, the students visited Bristol's Farm and received a first-hand look at how worms benefit a farm and its soil.

Since worms are so adept at breaking down organic matter, the program fits in with the state science requirements to teach recycling. Lisa Achee, one of the school's third-grade teachers, however, said the program does so much more. With Palladino's help, she said, the subject matter comes to life and the kids are able to learn a little about farming and fresh food in the process.

"He makes it fun and he has such a way with the kids," Achee said. "I've never seen kids so excited

about worms in their entire life."

This is the second year the entire third grade has participated in this particular science unit, said Dana McCormick, academic specialist at Cherry Brook. In addition the farm's involvement at the school is growing and this year Palladino gave a soil presentation to one of the second-grade classrooms. McCormick said bringing the science to life not only helps the kids but also helps the school as the state is looking for schools to offer more hands-on science learning.

While the teachers are thankful to Palladino for his time he is only too happy to have kids at the farm. In fact part of his company's (Wild Carrot Farm LLC) mission statement is "...to educate suburban and urban elementary and mid-

continued on page 15

Cherry Brook third-graders learn about nature's recyclers

continued from page 1

dle school children across the curriculum through programs at the farm and schools thereby fostering positive nutritional and environmental attitudes and promoting responsibility and self esteem."

He also said Achee is that "one in a million teacher" who will take the effort to make the program happen.

Palladino also hopes the kids will eat healthier after learning about local food and in turn their excitement helps keep him going - and their thank you cards make for good reading once the season ends.

"I don't think I could do this without the kids," he said.



Damon Kates peers in for a closer look as farmer Sarah Strecker explains how peas will climb just about anything.



Farmer Mark put some worms in a bucket for the kids who didn't find one in the compost piles.





Farmer Dan gets ready to pass out sunflowers to the visiting third-graders.



Farmer Mark uses an apple to show the kids how much of the earth can be farmed once oceans, deserts and other factors are accounted for.



This truck was painted using designs created by the Cherry Brook third-graders. The students couldn't use the vehicle paint so local artists Sarah Strecker, Roni Hyde, Heidi Olson, Kim Baisch, Carol Stoeke painted it utilizing their designs and paint provided by Torrington Toyota's body shop. The truck can be seen at the farm and was brought to the school for its art show.



Nick Perdomo digs for worms.



Ely Pidgeon digs for worms.



Farmer Mark and third-grade teacher Lisa Achee.

*Photos
by
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Farmers Mark and Sarah lead the kids through the Garden Song.