

Mr. Lunceford’s hog pen project a perfect teaching tool



Ronan ag sciences teacher Casey Lunceford participates in interview judging at the 2021 Lake County Fair. Lunceford also serves as an advisor for the Mission Valley branch of the National FFA Organization. (Scot Heisel/Lake County Leader)

With local mentors on hand to help and answer questions, students in Casey Lunceford's ag operations class poured a new concrete slab in the hog area at the Lake County Fairgrounds in April. (Courtesy of Sjann Vincent)

The finished slab and new metal pens were ready for show hogs to arrive this week for the Lake County Fair. (Scot Heisel/Lake County Leader)

By
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Lake County Leader
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RONAN — The old livestock barns at the Lake County Fairgrounds in Ronan have solid bones, according to Fair Manager Sjaan Vincent, but some improvements certainly are in order after years of use.

As swine supervisor during last year's Lake County Fair, Casey Lunceford, who teaches agriculture classes in the Ronan School District, saw firsthand that the hog pens in particular could use some love and care.

He also saw a major opportunity.

"It was hard. They were not as easy to clean. It just wasn't lovely," Vincent said of the old pens. "Casey said, 'You know, I could kill two birds with one stone here,' and he created his entire lesson plan around the project."

Lunceford's plan was to teach his ag operations students with a little on-the-job learning. Central to the plan was a 10 by 100 foot concrete slab over the dirt that had been dug up and churned by generations of show hogs. Once the concrete was done, his team would build new metal stalls to set on the concrete.

"It all led to the kids really having a heckuva education," Lunceford said Saturday.

Initially, the pen area needed to be dug out. Then students brought in gravel and leveled and compacted the entire area by hand.

By April they were ready to pour the concrete. They ordered in a truck from Treasure State Concrete in Ronan.

"Todd Knutson from Treasure State took a look the day before the pour," Vincent said. "He knew it would be tough because the hose that carries the concrete from the truck weighs about 175 pounds."

Vincent said Knutson talked with Eric Huffine, owner/operator of Concrete Wall and Slab in Ronan, suggesting that the students were in a bit over their heads.

"Eric hand picked a crew of three who were experienced and good teachers," Vincent said. "The next day they were there to help the kids with the pour."

The day of the pour started around 9 a.m., with the concrete really starting to flow around noon, Vincent said.

"There were a few kids who got permission from their parents to miss the whole day, so it wasn't just the class period, it was the entire day," Lunceford said.

Lunceford's students did the bulk of the heavy lifting, with their instructor and a crew of mentors nearby.

"We've got these kids doing the work with mentors right behind them, explaining it and talking them through it," Vincent said.

After the pour, the kids learned to finish the concrete as well.

"We were here until 5:30 at night, and those kids were exhausted," Vincent said. "(The mentors) stopped and talked to these kids afterward about the career opportunities and what it took and what they could do and how they would start out. I guess one of the girls walked out of the barn and said, 'Well, no need to go to college. I can go do this.'"

After the slab was set, Lunceford's team went about constructing the new pens.

Vincent said the Livestock Market provided some funding, and Northwest Counties Farm Bureau donated \$3,500 for the metal.

The metal work was all completed on a volunteer basis since the school year had ended, but the pens were up and ready for their new tenants to move in this week, when livestock begins arriving at the barns.

While it was a community effort, Vincent said it was Lunceford who really got things rolling.

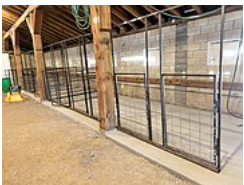
And it's the kind of initiative that led to Lunceford's nomination for the 2021 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence. His nomination, one of 61 across the nation, was announced last week.

The winners will be announced in late October. More than \$1 million in cash prizes will be shared by 18 teachers and their skilled trades programs.

"Despite the dramatic need for a new generation of workers, research has shown that most U.S. high school students do not have access to high-quality skilled trades programs. The goal of the prize is to highlight some of the most outstanding programs nationwide and to celebrate teachers who are making a big difference in the lives of students," said Danny Corwin, executive director of Harbor Freight Tools for Schools, in a press release.

"Casey Lunceford ... brings 10 years of experience owning and running a home company and sawmill to his teaching, as well as the skills from his high school and college days in Future Farmers of America," the press release states. "He has since earned a master's degree in Agriculture Education, and serves as an officer in the Montana Association of Agriculture Educators and Vice President for the Montana

Association of Career and Technology Educators. Lunceford’s favorite part of his work is seeing his students learn not just the hands-on techniques, but how they can make a living off those skills. ... In-class projects like overhauling the Lake County Fairgrounds’ hog barn and refurbishing horse stock trailers give students hands-on work and resume-building experience for future endeavors.”



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