

It's The Little Things That Show Impact

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN

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Purdue administrators are always asking us Extension educators to show how our programs are impacting our clients (the public). That's kind of hard for me to do. Am I supposed to count how many fewer trees are being topped? Should I snoop in people's backyards, to see how many of you have put in gardens?

But every now and then, I get a little message dropped in my lap that shows I'm making a difference in people's lives.

For example: In April, we had our annual Ag Days program at the 4-H Center. My booth was "Math on the Farm," where we demonstrate practical uses for arithmetic, while teaching the students about some farming terminology and introducing them to the financial woes farmers face. This year, we had a special Ag Night, so adults could see what it was all about.

One little girl came dragging her mother in. I recognized the student from her school shirt as someone who'd been in with her school earlier that day. She and her mom came up to my booth, with the young girl talking a mile a minute. She pointed at the basket on my table and said, "Mom! That's a bushel! And it holds fifty-four pounds of corn!" Then she went to my graphic of a whole pile of bushel baskets. "An' mom! That's how much corn a farmer can grow on an acre! A hunnerd and fifty bushels!"

She sorted through my posters until she came to the one on farm inputs. "An' Mom! These are all the bills a farmer has! He's got SOOOOO many bills that we can't even do the math!" This was a reference to the low price of corn that week. Based on the numbers we were using, the farmer's expenses were higher than his income, leaving a negative profit. Fourth graders haven't learned negative numbers yet, so subtracting a big number from a smaller number was impossible to them.

The young girl then put on an exaggerated frowny face and pointed at me. "And after I worked all summer, he took money out of MY pocket!" she declared, before breaking into giggles. I had tried to explain the negative farm income by describing how one of the students (obviously, this young lady) works on the farm all summer, and at the end, instead of getting paid for her efforts, I took money out of their pockets.

After performing my entire routine for me, she dragged her mother off to look at the cows. I'd have to say that this was proof that she learned something that day.

What about you, gentle reader? Have I or other educators had some impact in your lives? If so, would you be so kind as to send me a note, explaining how? I'd love to

share these (anonymously, of course) with my administrators and local elected officials.
Just email them to me at LCaplan@purdue.edu .