

News from the CJR Farm

A Year in Review

With spring upon us, it is always rewarding to reflect back on the previous year's accomplishments. 2021 was again a year of many challenges, yet yielded some very satisfying achievements.



While CJR continued to cope with the ramifications of the pandemic, the agricultural science program remained focused on what it does best, which involves students and staff working together as a team. By adapting and changing, we continued to make progress in providing a meaningful education during challenging times.

January proved to be outstanding, with the birth of three stellar calves: Two Herefords and one Angus. One Hereford calf was a heifer named Martina, and the other was a bull the boys named Puma. The Angus heifer was named Pearl, and she has all the makings of a real star. We have big plans for this trio and expect great success in the future.

The winter months can seem long. The weather was certainly cold and there was plenty of snow to be managed. Such times provide many great lessons in decision-making, with both animals and facilities. The students demonstrated their skills in firewood production by putting 6 to 8 cords in the storage shed during the winter months. They also learned about an alternative resource for heat and about marketing agricultural value-added products, including firewood.

February and March brought CJR's maple production into full swing, with CJR continuing its valued partnership with Brookview Sugarhouse. Our exposure to this industry and the level of participation in harvesting maple sap, cultivating and managing the sugar bush and learning about the processing of maple sugar products, is a major asset to our curriculum.

The season started at a snail's pace, with the initial outlook for a weather-shortened season. However, in early March, the weather pattern returned to a more traditional early spring pattern, and by all accounts, this turned a poor projection into an above average production year!

April arrived and brought much anticipated beautiful spring weather. The farm welcomed two robust litters of piglets. Petunia and Hazel delivered 10 and 13 piglets respectively. The deliveries were something out of a textbook. All piglets were born healthy, without assistance, and thrived immediately. Hazel cooperated by giving birth during a morning class, which allowed for student participation. One student has since made the comment that it was one of the most fulfilling experiences in his entire life.



The classes soon shifted gears into equipment preparations for lawn, garden, and hay production. Plants were started for vegetables, flowers, and most importantly, autumn produce items. The autumn items have been so important to our farm market opening, that a heavy focus and effort has been put on these agricultural products. Gardens were planted and haying was initiated. We all thought it was a great start to the season. The team harvested some beautiful hay in early June. The anticipation of an awesome production year was quite high. That changed abruptly for us, as it did for every farm in the region – with a period of sustained rain – and we went 3-4 weeks without making another bale of hay.

Despite disappointment in the hay fields, June brought a successful completion to the school year and the celebration of the year's graduates. Among these graduates was a boy named Tim. He was an exceptional student and a standout in the agricultural science program. Tim was the winner of the 2021 Sue B. Hart Award for Excellence in Agricultural Science and distinguished himself through his efforts in class. We were all sad when he left our program, but we also felt incredible satisfaction and pride in his accomplishments and we applauded his progress and success.

Summer school started in early July and we were stuck in the middle of a dreadful hay production year. With so much rain, even lawn care was on hold at times. With all of the rain, however, there was a silver lining: All of the soil types in our garden allowed for optimal growth, and despite conditions dictating that everything would rot, the produce flourished!

We got back on track in August, and the students were finally able to put enough first-cut hay in the barn for the winter feed needs. On top of that, 400 bales of premium second-cut hay were harvested in September, which helped that effort significantly. The students showed tremendous perseverance during the summer, as most had not been exposed to these challenges in prior years.



The highlight of the summer was the preparation of our Angus cow, May, and her January calf, Pearl, for entrance into the New York/New England Breeders Angus Sale in Bath, NY. The students worked diligently for months getting this pair ready. Anticipation was high, as we all thought the quality of these cattle was exceptional. Our work paid off, with the pair being purchased by Mud Creek Farm, which made them the number one top-selling lot in the entire sale. It was reaffirming that cattle we produce at CJR through thoughtful genetic selection and overall management are sought after by Angus breeders in New York and New England.



The 2021-2022 school year began in late August with immense enthusiasm for opportunities that lay ahead. The autumn months were some of the busiest of the year. Lawn care, garden harvest, equipment operation, maintenance and repair all continued late into the season.

Agricultural science and traditional science classes at CJR collaborated with the introduction of an applied science curriculum for an initial class of 7 students. Miss Brown and Mr. Elwell co-taught the class based on agricultural topics. The class is taught at the farm facility and combines classroom instruction with practical application on the farm. This new venture was a resounding success and improved student engagement. It is CJR's hope that this class will provide a pathway to future applied studies in the Cable Academic and Vocational Education Center's other vocational programs, including automotive technology and welding, building design and construction, culinary arts, fine arts and crafts, power technology, and wood technology.

Concentrated focus was essential to implementing strategies for the farm market opening during the month of October. This period of time also brought two more litters of piglets from Hazel and Petunia. Litters of 18 and 20, respectively, were extraordinary and provided opportunities for students to implement problem solving skills that would directly impact the health of these litters. In comparison to the spring, these deliveries were far from routine and much more complicated.

Two bull calves were also born in mid-October to our cows, Precious and Cassie. Both calves were born unassisted and are enjoying their time at CJR. We are calling them Buck and Beau. They are like two peas in a pod and it's hard to tell them apart.

The CJR farm market experienced great success once again this year. The harvest was as bountiful and beautiful as we have ever seen. The agricultural science classes provided the management, as well as the bulk of the market products. All other vocational classes contributed to the market as well. Many delicious baked items came from culinary classes in our Litchfield and Bristol schools; a brand-new sign was designed and created by our construction classes; Adirondack chairs were made in wood technology; pottery was made in art class; and wonderful horseshoe and pumpkin sculptures and other items were made in automotive technology and welding classes. The market has been a successful endeavor and has provided a valuable way to reach our local community and beyond. Our students have enjoyed the opportunity to showcase their talents and to act as ambassadors for the CJR program as a whole.

By the time the holidays arrived, we could reflect, with satisfaction, upon a full year of accomplishments despite numerous hardships. Equipment breakdown, weather, pandemic factors, and an ever-changing economic landscape that impacts our management plan created many challenges in 2021. We chose to focus on the triumphs and success that were achieved over the past year despite the hurdles we had to overcome. As a team, we learned important lessons as we pooled our cumulative talents to persevere and move forward in a positive direction.



So many lessons can be learned in times of adversity! One lesson we know well and always teach our students is that one's accomplishments are that much greater when completed under challenging circumstances.

We are thankful for the many important contributions CJR receives in support of the agricultural science classes and the CJR Farm, as well as annual gifts for general purposes. Such generosity is vital to our agricultural classes and the CJR Farm, which involve the care of our farm animals, crops and facilities on many acres of land.

The CJR staff and students are very grateful for the important relationships that have been built on a shared vision and recognition of the important benefits of agricultural experience in the lives of young people. We are also very appreciative of the interest and friendship of those who visit the Farm and Farm Market during CJR events, such as the annual *Cars for Kids* Automobile Show. Event proceeds and Farm Market sales benefit all of CJR programs, including our agricultural science classes.

Eric Elwell

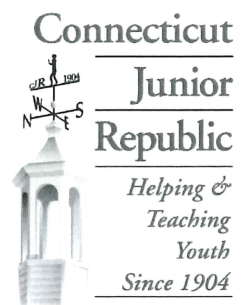
Eric Elwell

Farm Manager and Animal Science Instructor



CJR's Vocational Agriculture Program includes Animal and Plant Science classes – two of eight vocational education experiences offered to students of the Connecticut Junior Republic's Cable Academic and Vocational Education Center (CAVEC) on CJR's Litchfield Campus. Other classes include Building Design and Drafting, Creative and Fine Arts, Culinary Arts, Graphic Arts, Power Mechanics and Wood Technology.

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