

AG PEN PAL PROGRAM!

ADVICE FROM AN AG PEN PAL

Ag Pen Pals: Bruce & Karen Grant

Hometown: Meadow Grove, NE

Type of Farmer: Farrow to finish hog farm, corn, soybeans, alfalfa

ADVICE

A great way to blend our love for farming and our desire to inform young kids where their food comes from is to volunteer to be an Ag Pen Pal. Bruce and I have been Pen Pals with hundreds of kids over the course of approximately 10 years, but as with doing something you love to do, time flies and I really don't know how long we have been with the program.

My husband Bruce and I have a farrow to finish hog operation. We raise corn, soybeans, and alfalfa. We are proud to be a three-generation farming family, with Bruce's dad Richard and our son Jeremy and his wife Ann and their two newborns. We also have two other adult children. Jason is a dentist in Fairbury. He is married to Megan and they have two boys, a 4-year-old and a 6-month-old. Our daughter Kristen works at the Extension office. She is married to Randy Sindelar and they farm and raise cows and calves. I recently encouraged Kristen to join the Ag Pen Pal program. Kristen is excellent with children and is also proud to be a farmer.

When choosing to write to a class one needs to think about the age of the students, if they are from the inner city or the possibility that they are from a farm or rural area, or they could have grandparents or aunts and uncles on farms they are frequent visitors to. This makes a difference in how you write. If they have no idea about farm life one needs to be very clear about what each item you are referring to is. A baler to a city child means nothing, whereas, a rural child may make the connection.

I have trouble keeping my letters short so the students don't lose attention span so I add photos. I also ask the teacher to use one item per teaching session if she feels the kids are losing interest. I try to make the information so it can be broken down into smaller topics.

If I visit the classroom I take corn and soybeans, pictures from the farm, a book about farming that I read to them, and items from farm organizations that are age appropriate. If I am unable to visit the classroom I send the items throughout the year for the teacher to hand out.

In the fall letter, I introduce myself and my family. I tell the Pen Pals where I live, what we have for animals, what we grow for crops. I also tell them what we are doing at this time of the year. My second letter over the winter explains our row crops and alfalfa in more detail.

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My third letter in the spring is usually a diary of what the family members are doing on a daily basis for a span of one to three days depending on the age of my pals. I always include a list of by-products from our crops and livestock.

I tell the students how proud we are of our occupations. What we do on a daily basis is not really a job to us because we love what we do. I emphasize that one farmer feeds 155 people. I emphasize that we eat the food we raise, we drink the water from the well near our pivots, we are environmentally safe, and we care about the community. I always try to think about what the kids will share with their parents when they leave the classroom. The teachers also learn much from you when you are a Pen Pal. The teacher has to answer many questions from the students so it is important the teacher understands and can answer correctly.

My favorite part of being an Ag Pen Pal is the joy it brings me to visit in the classroom or receive letters from the students and they have learned about life on our farm and why we enjoy what we do on a daily basis. To hear the kids understand where their food source comes from is gratifying.