

'Barn-raisings' build up kids' knowledge of agriculture

More than 200 Farm Bureau-donated Learning Barns have found their way into elementary school and public libraries across Virginia.

Using plans made available by Virginia's Agriculture in the Classroom program, county Farm Bureaus have donated 211 Learning Barns since 2006. Plans are in place to donate another 143.

Each barn features agriculture-related books and other teaching tools that show children why agriculture is important in their lives and communities.

Franklin County Farm Bureau has donated 17 Learning Barns and has plans for more. Chesterfield County Farm Bureau has begun providing one barn for each of that county's 38 elementary schools; nine have been delivered, and 15 more are set for donation in the near future.

Some of the barns have been built by Farm Bureau volunteers like the Carroll County Farm Bureau Young Farmers. Others, like barns donated in Nelson and Henrico counties, have been built with assistance from youth involved in FFA or industrial arts programs at local high schools. County Farm Bureau women's committees, young farmer committees and boards of directors have played key roles in the donations.

"Not only do these barns help increase kids' awareness of agriculture, but they also get students interested in reading," said AITC Program Coordinator Lynn Stadelmeier. "Even if the student does like to read, they may show an interest in checking out the barn, and it can grow from there."

Donating the barns also helps county Farm Bureaus build a relationship with their local school systems, she noted.

"In some instances schools have invited farmers to visit and read to children and talk about their farms. That kind of personal interaction is extremely valuable for teachers, farmers and the children in their communities."

Fire Prevention Week: Oct. 4–10

Stay fire smart! Don't get burned

The 2009 National Fire Prevention Week will focus on burn awareness and prevention, as well as keeping homes safe from the leading causes of fires, including heating equipment fires.

Heating equipment fires accounted for 16 percent of all reported home fires, second behind the No. 1 cause of home fires, cooking fires. It also accounted for 21 percent of home fire deaths.

About one-third of home fires and deaths occur in December, January and February, when more space heaters, furnaces and fireplaces are used.

"It's important to have your chimney cleaned out by someone who is certified and trained, well before the winter heating season begins," said Jimmy Maass, safety coordinator for Virginia Farm Bureau.

Space heaters result in far more fires and losses than central heating devices and have higher risks relative to usage.

"If you are using a space heater, be sure to follow all accompanying directions," Maass said. "A good rule of thumb is to keep space heaters at least 3 feet away from flammable or combustible materials, like curtains and furniture."

Sixty-three percent of reported home fire deaths happened in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.

"There's no reason not to have a smoke alarm and no reason not to check to make sure your alarm works," Maass said. "Install a smoke alarm in each bedroom and at least one on each level of your home. Check the batteries at least once a month and replace the batteries when the time changes in the spring and fall."

Fire Prevention Week has ag connection—sort of

Fire Prevention Week was established in 1922 to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures and burned more than 2,000 acres. The fire began on Oct. 8 but continued into and did most of its damage on Oct. 9.

According to popular legend, the fire broke out after a cow belonging to Catherine O'Leary kicked over a lamp, setting first the barn, then the whole city on fire. In 1893 a *Chicago Tribune* reporter admitted that he fabricated that story because he thought it would make colorful news.

Dial before you dig



Know what's below.
Call before you dig.

Before digging anything on your property, call Miss Utility to receive the necessary utility clearances. The law requires property owners to call at least 48 hours before digging.

In May 2007, Miss Utility of Virginia became part of the national Call-Before-You-Dig system and now can be reached by dialing 811. The existing Virginia Miss Utility number, 800-552-7001, still works as well.

"To avoid an injury, damage or monetary fine, it is important to call Miss Utility before digging," said Jimmy Maass, safety coordinator for Virginia Farm Bureau. "Once underground lines are marked, consumers will know the location of utility lines so that they can dig safely.

"Farmers should be mindful of this especially when working near a road or utility right of way. If you have to excavate within a few feet of the markings, it is recommended that you dig by hand and use caution."