

**Ag in the Classroom News Release  
Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation®**

**Website link:**

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**January 10, 2013**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Merrimac School Team Recognized for Agricultural Literacy Work**

A team of elementary educators at Merrimac Community Charter School are the recipients of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Ag in the Classroom's Outstanding Teacher Award.

Each year the Wisconsin Farm Bureau recognizes a teacher or team of teachers for their efforts in educating students on the importance of agriculture. This year's winning team includes elementary-age teachers: Jenna McCann, Jamie Christianson, Nancy Toberman, Tracy Haupt and Kathie Thompson.

"This is the first time Wisconsin has had a team as our award recipient. It really allows our program to showcase the school's effort to include agricultural literacy in all grade levels," said Darlene Arneson, Wisconsin Ag in the Classroom Coordinator. "Teachers of all grade levels and subject areas, with the exclusion of certified agriculture education instructors, are eligible to apply for the award."

The Merrimac Community Charter School (MCCS) began a partnership five years ago with local master gardeners where students researched local produce, garden formats and took soil samples. Composting, food preparation and crop rotation activities grow each year as older students become knowledgeable mentors.

Near the school garden is a 16-acre school forest where students have been active in the restoration phase of the forestry education curriculum.

"Making everyday connections to Wisconsin agriculture helps the students understand where their food comes from," Arneson said.

A fieldtrip to an aquaponic greenhouse in North Freedom first inspired the students to set up their own fish tank. Lettuce and other vegetables (shared with the entire school district's lunch program) now grow hydroponically from the top of the school tanks.

MCCS classes also take field trips to Ski-Hi Apple Orchard, Wollersheim Winery, Cedar Valley Cheese, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Dairy Forage Research Center

to learn about the diversity of Wisconsin agriculture. School-wide math and literacy curriculum includes mapping and creating a small orchard, pickling and cheese-making.

Karen Reisinger, Sauk County Farm Bureau President and Ag in the Classroom volunteer, works closely with the school and makes quarterly visits about Wisconsin agriculture.

The Merrimac team will be Wisconsin's nominee for the National Excellence in Teaching Agriculture Award and will receive a cash award to be used for agricultural resources or towards the National Ag in the Classroom Conference that will be held in Minnesota in June 2013. A presentation was made to the Merrimac School acknowledging their teachers' team effort on January 9.

The winning team includes:

- Jenna McCann teaches 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades and is a graduate of UW-Platteville and UW-Oshkosh.
- Jamie Christianson teaches 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades and is a graduate of UW-Madison and UW-LaCrosse.
- Nancy Toberman teaches kindergarten and is a graduate of Central College.
- Tracy Haupt teaches 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades and is a graduate of UW-Stevens Point and Edgewood College
- Kathie Thompson teaches 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades and is a graduate of UW-Madison.

For more information on the Ag in the Classroom's Outstanding Teacher Award, contact Darlene Arneson at 608.828.5719. Information about the National Ag in the Classroom Conference and teacher scholarships can be found at [www.agclassroom.org](http://www.agclassroom.org)

*Farm Bureau's Ag in the Classroom program provides teachers and students K-12 with an understanding of how their food is produced. The program seeks to work within existing curricula to provide basic information on our nation's largest industry: Agriculture. Wisconsin's Ag in the Classroom program is carried out by a network of local educators, volunteers and representatives from agricultural organizations and businesses. The goal of the program is to help students gain a greater awareness of the role of agriculture in the economy and society, so that they may become citizens who support wise agricultural policies.*

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Editors: Photos Available Upon Request