

This years harvest a giant success for Sardis Secondary students



Kayla Mclauchlin and Mikayla Peter sit atop one of the giant pumpkins grown this year by students from Sardis Secondary School. (Sarah Gawdin/The Progress)

Students in SSS's agriculture program grew nine giant pumpkins this season

- [SARAH GAWDIN](#)
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Students from Sardis Secondary School's leadership and agriculture classes pose in front of the festive Halloween scene, complete with giant pumpkins grown on the Sardis Secondary School Farm on Richardson Avenue. (Sarah Gawdin/The Progress)

Students involved in Sardis Secondary School's (SSS) agriculture class may have bit off more than they can chew when they planted some giant pumpkins seeds this spring on the school's five acre farm.

“There’s no GMO in these pumpkins,” said Joe Massie, who teaches the course along with Tania Toth. “They’re just bred to be huge,” he continued, pointing to a festive orange gourd that easily tips the scales at a few hundred pounds.

Having pushed just shy of a dozen seeds into the ground this spring, Massie says there was no shortage of work for students involved in the summer session of the SSS agriculture programming as there’s a lot of work involved in growing pumpkins.

“They learned how to train the pumpkin plants (and) about pruning the vines so the plant focuses all of its power on the one fruit,” said Massie.

And their hard work paid off. At the end of the season, the Sardis Secondary School agriculture class harvested nine giant pumpkins: they kept three for a school Halloween display, and donated the rest to local elementary schools.

But students learned so much more than pumpkin care in the course, which not only counts as credits towards their high school graduation, but also comes with three university credits from the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV).

Once a week, students meet with Tom Baumann for a three-hour horticulture skills and techniques class. “It’s hands-on practice that really fits well with what we do here,” added Massie.

“It’s just such a great opportunity for lots of (school) credits ... and to help learn more about (agriculture),” said 16-year-old Kayla Mclauchlin, who lives on a family farm and is taking the Sardis course for a second time, having passed the grade 11 level.

“I took (Agriculture 11) and it was really interesting,” said Mclauchlin’s classmate, Mikayla Peter, who also lives on her family’s farm.

“I was really curious and it was so much fun being hands-on, and being able to spend (more time) outside because that’s where I love to be.”

And with five acres of land planted with dozens and dozens of fruits and vegetables, there’s no shortage of hands-on, outside experience for Peter and the rest of her class as agriculture is year-round.

“We’re still growing and harvesting,” said Massie, who named off a list of cold-weather plants like lettuce and Brussels Sprouts that are still producing at this time of year. And for 15 weeks, members of the Community Supported Agriculture program provided small and large boxes of mixed, freshly picked produce for 30 families for a fee, plus the families of the nearly 70 students who participated.

“It’s how we fundraise for the program and all of the money goes back into the program,” explained Massie. The money also helps to pay the UFV tuition costs of all Sardis students enrolled in the program.

“We even have bursaries that we offer,” which is helpful for anyone pursuing a post-secondary education because the university UFV credits are transferable. “These could even be elective credits for a nursing (degree), or whatever they need it for.”

As for the course itself, Massie says it “introduces (students) to what university is like ... and opens up their eyes to opportunities. “And it’s stressful enough applying to university, and this really eases that process for them.”

For more information about the Sardis agriculture programming, or to learn more about participating in any of the programs, please contact either Joe Massie at joe_massie@sd33.bc.ca, or Tania Toth at tania_toth@sd33.bc.ca.