

September 29, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I have had the incredible opportunity to learn from a group of educators over the last year and am writing in enthusiastic support of the Backyard Poultry Team. They are fully deserving of the NACAA Search for Excellence Award for Livestock Programming.

Several examples come to mind when thinking about the care and commitment displayed by the Backyard Poultry Team. Our family began our farming journey only a year and a half ago and, like many new farmers, a flock of laying hens was one of our first endeavors. Imagine my excitement, then, when my first email communication from our cooperative extension agency included a zoom series on raising a home flock. As the world began to pivot online, I would have never known the poultry team wasn't always accustomed to online instruction. Every week, multiple team members were present to make the seminars flow seamlessly. I was particularly impressed with the management of the technology: someone monitoring the chat room and typing answers as needed, someone delivering the content, someone providing collaboration in material, and then someone always politely interjecting pertinent questions from the chat. The team uses technology as the aide it can be, and it has never once been a hindrance to learning due in whole to their skill at managing it. Having now taken multiple different online class offerings from multiple different departments (and even different states), I confidently assert that this team does online education best. Even online, one can tell they enjoy excellent rapport, and know each other's strengths and use them so well.

A second example of the excellent instruction received by this team is the fact that my children felt confident enough to purchase their own batch of laying chicks to raise this summer. As homeschoolers, we incorporated the seminars last spring into our learning and the kids (ages 10 to 6) absorbed so much content and are now applying it in real time while successfully raising 70 now-pullets. It has been a joy to see them use their training from the poultry team while setting up and managing the brooder, monitoring the chicks' comfort and adjusting heat lamps, and now shifting the chicks to an outdoor run ("Remember Mom, we have to think for them at this age when it rains!"). As a family, we have rewatched and revisited notes from a couple of different seminars from the spring and it has been so helpful. We began applying safer egg handling basics this past spring after that seminar with our first established flock and are so glad to be armed with that information as the kids continue to consider selling eggs next spring from this new group.

We employ a pasture-based system, and this leads me to another example of this team excelling in their role of education. One of our most recent classes was the Forages for Poultry seminar. The information was so complete and well thought out that I continually had my questions answered before I could even ask them. One of those included guidance on which forages to plant, and my husband and I have taken

that information into account already while planning out our pasture goals going into next spring. We have also already made a couple of tweaks to our rotational system to get our birds working more efficiently for us as they follow our cattle and sheep. While it felt too late to alter our pasture clipping routine this year, we will be changing some of those practices next year as well due to our increased knowledge from the class.

After we finished the first Home Flock series, I remember remarking to my husband that I was so surprised at the amount and quality of education accessible for free in our county and state through the extension department. We are big fans, and whole-heartedly believe that our Backyard Poultry Team deserves as much support and recognition as possible. Each team member is knowledgeable, responsive to questions, and kind. They should be chosen for the Search for Excellence Award.

Sincerely,

Margaret Mehaffey