Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum Soldiers, veterans explore agricultural career paths

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- The beekeeping business is buzzing at Churchill Farms in Watertown, and two 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldiers were getting hands-on learning in this career field May 24.

The tour was part of the Farm OPS program through Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) in Jefferson County, which introduces farming and agriculture careers to veterans and transitioning service members.

Participants were introduced to the equipment, clothing and materials needed to manage a bee farm and the process of making honey and other products. They also donned protective gear to work the bee-pacifying smokers while immersing themselves among hundreds of bees for a closer look at the colonies.

“This was awesome,” said Sgt. Samantha Ingraham, a Black Hawk crew chief with 10th Combat Aviation Brigade. “Everything we were shown today was completely new to me. The bees were far more docile than I thought. They weren’t being aggressive because we weren’t being aggressive.”

Sgt. Max Johnson, with 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, said that he learned a lot about bee farming and honey production from Rolly Churchill’s tour and instruction.

“Personally, I didn’t know much about bee farming before today, but I think we all were able to learn something new,” he said.

“There are innumerable opportunities for people to enter the agricultural career field,” said Catherine Moore, Farm Ops project director. “But very few people really understand agriculture or don’t think about it as a career. So, we’re trying to get the word out that this is a great opportunity, and that we’d like to provide very unique, individualized and focused opportunities for them to learn what would work for them.”

She said that veterans can use this program to gain experience and insight into different careers, even if they are not yet sure what exactly they want to pursue.

Sloan Rowland, Farm OPS program coordinator, said there is a transitioning Soldier who is conducting a six-month mentorship at a local dairy farm through Farm OPS.

“He wants to eventually get a job in dairy production, and there’s a lot of jobs available right now in that field, so this is his segue into that,” she said.

Ingraham learned about the Master Gardener certification through Career Skills Program (CSP) briefings at Fort Drum Soldier for Life – Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP).

Johnson said there is a list of more than 60 career fields in agriculture to explore through CSP, and he honed in on the Master Gardener certification.

“You definitely learn a lot in this course – everything from the types of soils, what to plant and where, how to check pH balance and all the common mistakes that can be made,” he said. “I came in knowing absolutely nothing, but it was an interest of mine that I wanted to learn more about. And I learned a lot.”

Soldiers can apply for CSP training and internships at SFL-TAP inside Clark Hall.

“The CSP is designed to help Soldiers gain experience through internships, or attain a certification through employment skills training to assist them in finding careers after the military,” said Emily Coslet, Career Skills Program administrator. “The program is open to anyone receiving an honorable discharge who is within 180 days of their separation date. Soldiers are encouraged to start the exploration process nine to 12 months before that date.”

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For further information regarding this release, contact Fort Drum Public Affairs at 315-772-9043 or email [Katherine.E.Wright12.civ@mail.mil](mailto:Katherine.E.Wright12.civ@mail.mil).