Agriculture students at Archdale-Trinity Middle School have gained a valuable window of opportunity through the use of virtual reality goggles. Teacher Brenda Collins recently received an agriculture education grant from NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission Agriculture Education Grant which she used to purchase a set of the goggles.

With 17 years of experience teaching agriculture, Collins started up the ATMS agriculture program in 2010. She teaches Exploring Biotechnology for seventh graders and Exploring Agriculture Science for eighth graders. “My hope is to give my students an opportunity to virtual visit farming enterprises that they could not do in real life,” she said. “The VR equipment will be used for students to visit farms, ranches, processing plants and other agricultural enterprises from the classroom. The tools will give 21st century tools in their hands and expose them to different types of agriculture in other states, as well as other countries. I hope it will expose students the variety of careers that are available in the agricultural realm.”

Collins’ students were eager to try out the goggles, now fully set up for use after students returned from their winter break. Last week, the students in one of her classes watched sheep shearing on a farm in Australia. “It gave me a better experience seeing how sheep shearing takes place in Australia,” said Avery Dykes. “We would never have been able to take a field trip to Australia, would we?” asked Collins.

On the way back from Australia, students took a side trip with the goggles. “This is awesome,” said ATMS student Jake Kulwicki, wearing a set of VR goggles as he viewed an Indianapolis race track experience so realistic he got a little woozy. “My car is red. What color is yours?” “Mine is yellow,” said Kevin Rutayisire as he ‘drove’ a racer while wearing his own set of goggles.

“My hope is to give my students a virtual opportunity to visit farming enterprises that they could not do in real life,” said Collins. “I also will be using it to take students inside cells, as the seventh graders learn about DNA and biotechnology.”

Collins believes it is never too soon to introduce students to the principles of agriculture, which affects all phases of human life. “Every human being is impacted directly by agriculture,” said Collins. “I see middle school agriculture helping to increase agricultural literacy among my students, which will benefit them whether they choose to pursue a career in agriculture — the nation’s biggest employer — or just be a well-informed consumer of agricultural products.”

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