By DEBBIE HIGHTOWER

TRINITY — Wheatmore High School Agriculture program recently experienced another expansion thanks to a $5,500 "Grants for Growing" from Tractor Supply, which funded construction of a three-compartment kidding pen inside the Finch Farms Livestock Barn.

According to agriculture teacher Lindsay Davis, the new facility was completed over the summer by former Trinity High School agriculture student Caleb Deal.

During a tour inside the barn, there was a chance to feed goats and watch them being watered and cared for inside the pens — experiences that Wheatmore High School agriculture students get to have every day.

"It is a very versatile facility," said Davis, who explained that the primary function of the pen is to isolate and preg goats who are scheduled to give birth. The pen is also used to isolate sick animals such as fever steers who are also raised at the facility.

First item on the morning’s agenda, FFA president, secure a wether named Squirt onto a grooming stand to monitor their health status, also check each animal’s access to fresh water. Craddock aspires to enter an animal science program at N.C. State while Kenney has set her mind on a career as a veterinarian.

A new senior, Kennedy was on hand in the barn in 2014 to watch male goat named Squirt being born along with his twin. She watched as Craddock put the three-year old without a grooming stand to trim his hooves.

Kennedy believes the kidding pen will be a valuable asset, explaining, "Now all the students will be able to watch the goats give birth.

The grooming stand is also used to milk dairy goats — milk used for a much-anticipated batch of goat milk soap made and sold by agriculture students.

Josh Neal was among 28 freshman Born inside the Finch Farms Livestock Barn in 2014, this goat is named Boomer.

agriculture students who headed up to the barn for morning chores such as clean up a pasture where a half-dozen or so steers roamed.

He has been hooked on agriculture since the first time he visited the barn as an eighth-grader during a tour of Wheatmore facilities.

"I knew then that I wanted to do this class," he said. "It looked kind of fun and something that I would like to do in the future.

Davis explained the value of such hands-on exposure for students and the other Wheatmore students who work with a local veterinarian.

"These students trim hooves, de-born, castrate, animals and give them their shots," she said. "We get our Holstein steers when they are a day old and they bottle-feed them until we sell them at 3 to 400 pounds.

They do it all.

Nancy Cross, Director of CTE and Innovative School Design said, "Nothing is more impactful than the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in a classroom setting to authentic application. Our RCSA Agriculture Education classrooms pair beautifully with lab experiences such as the Wheatmore High School barn to provide those important connections for students everyday."

At the livestream, Wheatmore agriculture students get the opportunity to care for goats and steers. This cow came here when it was a day old and was bottle-fed by Wheatmore students. Here, Austin Sink applies insect repellent to the 600-pound animal as James Green watches.

At Wheatmore High School, FFA intern Jessica Kennedy and Cody Craddock, FFA president, secure a wether named Squirt onto a grooming stand inside the livestock barn. Kennedy was on hand for Squirt’s birth at the facility in 2014.