2nd Annual Emerging Ag Conference Provides Entrepreneurial Ideas in Agriculture

On February 20th, 2016 Wright State University Lake Campus agriculture students and the local community gathered at Wright State University Lake Campus Dicke Hall for the 2nd Annual Emerging Agricultural Conference. The scope of the conference was to cover a wide range of topics related to production, business and entrepreneurial endeavors. Matt Aultman, one of the conference speakers, summed up the conference pretty well “Farming is more than just growing corn and soybeans.” Joining Matt to discuss agricultural entrepreneurial opportunities was Tori Bruns of Anna, Ohio. Bruns is a student at the Ohio State University majoring in Sustainable Plant Systems specializing in Agronomy and Horticulture. She started her own business Mustard Seed Farm Market growing local fruits and vegetables in her community. She shared her success stories and discussed the lessons learned along the way.

The conference keynote speaker was Janelle Mead, Deputy Director of the Ohio Department Agriculture, who shared information about the importance of agriculture in Ohio. The state is rich in agriculture and opportunities which was shown by the roughly 60 young agriculturists in attendance. Attendee, Thomas Shaw stated “The Emerging Ag conference is like nothing else out there and is being held in the best agricultural counties in the state of Ohio. It brings not only established growers together but brings young Ag professionals who have the desire and the passion to be part of agriculture industry. Whether we were strengthening our knowledge about bio security and manure management or learning about new loans offered to not only the young ag producer but to those established growers as well. I only see room for this conference to grow, the things that I learned will help build my future in agriculture.”

The success of the program has lead members of Wright State University Collegiate Young Farmers to start planning for the 2017 Emerging Agricultural Conference, and they would appreciate any feedback. Please contact Lora Berning, berning.35@wright.edu, with suggestions or additional information about the conference.

Fall 2016 Classes: Digging into Agriculture

Spring courses are coming to an end and Fall will be in full swing before we know it. Fall 2016 brings another great line up of courses. We’ll again see great courses like Agricultural Society, Nutrient Management, Introduction to Animal Science, Ag Finance and Animal Health and Physiology. The Midwest Agriculture Tour, Soil Science and Agriculture Economics will be joining the Fall lineup of courses.

The Midwest Agriculture Tour will actually take place from June 22nd-24th, 2016 with a few classes being held during the Fall semester. The tour will take students on an adventure across Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. Interactive agriculture stops will include Beck Seeds, DowAgro Sciences, Purina, St. Louis Arch, Anheuser-Busch, and the Melvin Price Locks and Dam. Space is limited and you’ll want to sign up for this great adventure.

Soil Science is a new course focusing on the chemical, physical and biological properties of soil and their importance in agricultural production. This course will be great for anyone interested in agronomy or learning about the foundation to agricultural production; our soil.

Agriculture Economics has not been taught since 2010 and is a critical course for students to understand important business principles to be successful in agricultural production. Don’t let the name scare you because this is sure to be a cornerstone in your agriculture education. Please be sure to see Mark Hibner about scheduling and contact Greg McGlinch if you have specific questions about the agriculture courses offered.
Agriculture is an industry that connects people with not only their food but places. This was true for the agriculture students at Wright State University Lake Campus who recently embarked on an agricultural adventure to the Central America country of Panama. The study abroad tour was primarily focused on agricultural production in Panama and the people involved with the tropical food production. Over the course of nine days, the students were exposed to various agricultural crops, climates and culture.

Our arrival to Panama provided us with the necessary dose of Vitamin D we had all been awaiting. During the first few days of the trip, we traveled through one of the seven modern wonders of the world: the Panama Canal. While on the transit through the canal we had the first-hand experience of how ships were moved through the Panamanian canal system. The maritime travel provided the group with an opportunity to travel across the continental divide towards the Pacific Ocean. The ships were taller than most of the 9,000 bushel grain bins on my farm and they had little margin of error while navigating through the 110’ by 1000’ locks. We had the opportunity to come in contact with various species of monkeys and wildlife that call Panama home. After exploring the “Old City” in Panama we began our cross country tour towards the mountains of Panama.

Pineapple is a fruit that most of us enjoy and it’s not grown on a tree. The cultivation of this crop is very labor intensive and cost as much as $30,000 per hectare (2.47 acres) to establish. It’s quite the investment for a crop that will only produce for two years. From pineapple, we went to poultry. Jesus, the chicken farmer, provided us an in-depth tour of his poultry farm and stressed the importance of biosecurity! As a small farmer he was breeding some rare chickens that were to be sold at high end restaurants and grocery stores in Panama. He had a small scale farm that was based on similar American family farm values.

Our progression along the Pacific coastline of Panama lead to an array of agricultural operations. The Don Juan cigar factory uses Cuban tobacco to produce high end Panamanian cigars. The cigars were rolled only by women who generally produce 150 cigars per day. Moving from cigars to cashews, we ventured down the bumpy roads of Panama. Cashews are labor intensive but a tasty treat. All the cashew nuts are opened by hand and inspected by individuals in a climate controlled environment. What’s interesting about a cashew is that the seed is on the outside of the fruit and the shell is actually toxic. That’s why you can never buy raw cashews. From the cashew factory we ventured onto a sugar cane farm. The farm was in the midst of harvest and the factory was processing the sugar cane 24 hours a day in three shifts. The 7,000 hectare farm is able to harvest sugar cane from the same plant for three years. We wrapped the day up by visiting the Panamanian Salt Flats. Here sea water is pumped into large areas where the sun and wind evaporate the water leaving the sea salt to be collected. The salt is then placed in bags containing 100 pounds of the material and then shipped to the local factory. The day was full of sweet and salty treats of Panama and students gained a greater appreciation of these segments of agricultural production.

Our sixth day involved an educational farm and coffee production. During the cool morning hours we visited the Lo Tuyo educational farm. The farm was started in 2011 by German volunteers to help educate and allow the Panamanians to be sustainable in the agriculture sector. This educational farm provided Panamanian children and adults with the tools and resources to grow crops native to their country. The farm would supply them with plants, seeds and the most important part, market the products these farmers produced. The 2 hectare farm was a great educational opportunity that allowed students to see how small scale agriculture production can help the people of Panama. After a long adventure we finally made it to the mountain region of Boquete. The area was known as an “eternal spring” because the conditions are warm during the day with cool misty nights. There we ate a local lunch of trout and vegetables grown along the hillside. We finished the day off with tour of Finca Lerida, a coffee farm. Our visit to this farm makes one appreciate the hard work that goes into coffee production. Every coffee bean is hand-picked and the plant grows along the hillside. It generally take 2 hours for laborers to fill a 5 gallon bucket and get this, they only make $25.00 a day! Now every cup of coffee I drink, I’ll have a greater appreciation for the time, money and work that goes into that Cup of Joe.

The final days of the trip the group enjoyed touring small agricultural farmers in the mountainous region of Panama and preparing for the departure home. Our final night was cool and allowed us to begin acclimating to the much cooler temperatures in Ohio. After experiencing international agriculture and hearing the positive comments the students had about the trip, I would encourage anyone to travel abroad. A trip of this nature not only allows you to appreciate agriculture production in foreign countries but the people and cultures. Agriculture may be different in all parts of the world but we’re all connected by our commitment to produce a safe, healthy and reliable supply of food.

President Lora Berning represented Wright State University Collegiate Young Farmers Organization at the Ohio Farm Bureau Ag Day at the Capital. She opened the day with saying the Pledge of Allegiance. Farm Bureau Members had the opportunity to discuss the latest issues facing agriculture today with state representatives.