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TALL XVI

Session 1 - College Station, TX

July 17-20, 2018

Extension, Education, Expectations

Selected from across the state and from a variety of professions, the TALL XVI members I met upon my arrival to College Station impressed me from the start! Although I have been involved in agriculture from the time I was a child, there are a wide variety of businesses and operations represented in this group and it will be fascinating to compare similarities and differences between us, while we discuss the challenges agriculture faces. We have much to teach each other and much to learn from the exceptional group of speakers and tours Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz has scheduled for our sessions.

Dr. Jim kicked the session off with some comments on the history of the TALL program and outlined some of the expectations he has of us. As the participants introduced themselves, I was impressed by their accomplishments and very excited to be part of this group.

Dr. Jeff Ripley with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service also welcomed us and predicted that we would become part of the TALL "family" after our experiences together in this session and the ones to come. It will be an honor to be part of that "family"!

TDCJ

Mr. Todd Swick from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice gave an overview of the Agribusiness, Land & Minerals program that includes all the livestock and crop production for the Texas prison system. I was astounded to hear the size and scale of the operation. According to Mr. Swick, they operate with a budget of \$58 million and cultivate 37,000 acres of cropland, run about 15,000 head of cattle and 1400 horses, among other crops and livestock. Most impressive to me was the statistic Mr. Swick shared that the program shows a 75% return on investment each year! They produce about 40% of the food needed for the inmates at 70% of the cost of purchasing the same food. Inmates are fed for \$2.47 per day, greatly reducing the cost to the taxpayers, and the jobs provide inmates with activity and incentive to behave. The prison's cotton operation particularly interested me as a cotton producer. The cotton gin machinery they use is not the most advanced, but as he pointed out, they are short on cash for upgrades but flush with manpower, so they can take advantage of free labor at the expense of more modern machinery. Mr. Swick's sense of humor about a stressful job must make him pleasant to work with also. He closed with the lesson of the windmill and the need to pass knowledge on.

Texas A&M Forest Service

We took a short bus ride to the Texas A&M Forest Service Emergency Operations Center, where we were greeted by Mr. Tom Boggus, State Forester and Director of the Forest Service. Mr. Boggus outlined the amount of acreage they are monitoring for wildfires and how they use the impressive technology we could see in the room to predict where fires may occur. He emphasized their philosophy to treat the local fire departments as partners in fighting fires and that the Forest Service will not take control of incidents, but will act as a resource and backup to the local command.

Mr. Mark Stanford, Associate Director, next spoke to us about the tools they use to predict and warn of potential wildfire danger. Their efforts to predict have been crucial in allowing evacuations to occur in advance of fires, particularly notable in the 2011 Bastrop fire where several thousand people were evacuated in a short time period. Mr. Stanford was able to show digital maps and photos of fires in the last several years and talked of how weather conditions and changes in land use contribute to fire danger. I find it comforting to know how hard the Texas A&M Forest Service is working to predict, mitigate and prevent these fires. Mr. Stanford and his team showed us a template for the online Ranch Management Preparedness Plan they will soon launch. It allows landowners to enter basic information about their ranch (location of gates, structures, hazards, water sources, etc.) into a database to assist firefighters in accessing and protecting their ranches during a fire.

Ms. Gretchen Riley, State Forester, gave us a short demo of the Texas Forest Info website. Most of the tools are available to the public and many looked very useful in finding information and mapping forested areas.

Just before we left, the staff demonstrated the sand table for us. The sand table is used to model terrain from anywhere in the state and is used by the fire crews to simulate a fire situation. Using a digital overlay, they can apply fire control measures and see the effect of those tools in a simulation. Throughout our visit, we could see how they are using technology to their full advantage, while remaining focused on their mission to support Texas fire departments with the necessary resources. All of this was a good reminder that every household needs to have a fire plan to protect family and property should a fire occur.

Etiquette Training and Dinner

During our evening dinner, Ms. Susan Quiring provided some etiquette training for use during business dinners. Most of us knew the basics of table manners, but a little refresher course in handling silverware and table items was helpful and Ms. Quiring's gentle, non-judgmental approach was much appreciated. Knowing the reasons why things are done a certain way certainly helps one remember to observe the customs, such as putting silverware in the proper position when finished as a signal to the wait staff to remove the dishes. She provided take-home tip sheets that outline business etiquette in many situations. The dinner was a reminder that using proper etiquette helps make people's first impression of you a good one.

Responsibilities of the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory

Wednesday morning Dr. Guy Sheppard, Veterinary Diagnostician with the TVMDL, gave us an overview of the lab's responsibilities for research and testing, which include the state's only full service diagnostic lab, drug testing for horse racing and stock show animals, testing and research on high consequence diseases and consultation with veterinarians on difficult cases. He mentioned "One Health" to explain the interconnectedness of animals, humans and the environment and how diseases can move between them. This lab is accredited and certified at the highest levels and has its own quality assurance personnel to ensure lab results are accurate. Dr. Sheppard also briefly explained the items available on the TVMDL app and their digital cytology service that uses smartphone photos for quick lab results. In a livestock-rich state like Texas, this laboratory is vitally important.

Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Issues Facing Agriculture

Due to a scheduling conflict, Dr. Jim stepped in for Dr. David Lunt to present information about AgriLife Research and its priorities. As a cotton grower, I have firsthand experience with AgriLife Research from their annual crop testing plot results that are shared with growers statewide. Even so, I was surprised at the massive scope of

their research projects, but was not surprised to find out they are the number one ag research entity in the United States and probably the world. As Dr. Jim pointed out, there are several climate zones in Texas that allow them to replicate many of the world's growing conditions for research. He also touched on three major areas of change in agriculture: global food security, water demand and demographic changes. Research in each of these areas is needed and is ongoing. Dr. Jim then outlined areas of research priority for the agency: sustainability, vector-borne diseases, precision agriculture and the nexus of food and health. I am certain we will see many viable solutions come out of their research. The funding for much of this research now comes from corporations because of cuts to state and federal funding. AgriLife researchers can get royalties on patented research that is licensed and those royalties can go to AgriLife and the researcher - this helps with retention.

Dr. Jim provided some statistics about the make-up of the AgriLife Extension service and its funding. He also touched on a current hot topic - GMO's. As Dr. Jim pointed out, a gene is a digestible protein, modified or not. Most agriculturists see the need for genetically modified seeds, but we will have to continue educating the consumer about the benefits of GMO's and the absence of any scientific evidence of harm from them.

NAFTA, Tariffs and National Policy on the World Stage

Dr. Luis Ribera from the Center for North American Studies in the Department of Agricultural Economics gave a fascinating presentation on current ag issues. He focused on four areas: the importance of agricultural trade, the success or failure of NAFTA, China and Brazil. The United States is the world's largest ag exporter, with \$138 billion in ag exports in 2017. We export 35% of our ag production and 37% of that goes to Mexico. Interestingly, US cotton exports about 87% of its production, while beef exports only 10% and corn only 15%. On the flip side, we import virtually 100% of our coffee, limes and bananas and half of our tomatoes.

Population growth, and increasing income for much of that population, is fueling demand for protein. Consumers in other countries spend a higher percentage of their income on food than we do in the United States. US consumers spend just 6.3% of income on food, while in Mexico it's 23%, in Ukraine 38% and in Nigeria an astounding 59%. It should really make us appreciate the ease with which we can obtain and afford food!

Regarding NAFTA's success or failure, Dr. Ribera showed figures proving ag trade and investment did increase dramatically under NAFTA, but ag trade is only 6% of exports. Trade deficits in other categories, such as auto parts, resulted in mixed reviews on the success of NAFTA. In Dr. Ribera's view, NAFTA was a success for agriculture, but like most agreements made that long ago, could use an update.

Dr. Ribera spoke briefly about China and Brazil, which are of special interest to cotton growers like myself. China is the biggest buyer of our exported cotton and Brazil was our opponent in a trade dispute with WTO that was part of the reason for cotton being excluded from the last farm bill. As he noted, we have a huge trade surplus with China in ag products, because they import so much of their food, but we have a trade deficit in all other categories. President Trump's recent tariff threats against China may decrease their imports from the USA, while increasing their imports from Brazil. Brazil is of note to Dr. Ribera because they are one of the few countries in the world that still have room to increase farm acres and they are a huge exporter of ag products, particularly soybeans. Potential stumbling blocks for Brazil are a lack of infrastructure and an uncertain political situation. I will definitely look up his studies online and share that information with interested farmers at home.

Producer's Lunch at John Giesenschlag's Facility

John and Connie Giesenschlag and John's sister Melinda hosted our group for lunch at their shop. Mr. Giesenschlag is a local producer and businessman and a longtime supporter of TALL. Mr. John Smith of Citizens State Bank and Mr. Lynn Angell of Monsanto helped to sponsor the lunch. Mr. Smith and Mr. Giesenschlag gave some kind remarks of welcome to our group and shared why they support TALL and what they believe it has to offer. During a delicious lunch catered by Mr. Cody Whitten, I was able to meet and visit with some area producers and agribusiness owners. It's always interesting to compare notes with others in your field to see the different ways we handle things - it often leads to new ideas for your own operation.

Wiggins LLP - Watermelon Warehouse Inc.

Mr. Jody Wiggins and his son, Clint, welcomed us to their watermelon warehouse and shipping facility. Their extensive operation includes several facilities and farms in locations across the state and in Mexico. I was astounded to learn that they expect to ship 3000 truckloads of watermelon this year - that is over 7 million watermelons! Most of their melons are sold in Texas, so look for Wiggins Watermelon labels at your store. They employ a number of visa workers, some from as far as Haiti, and many of those workers return for many years. Visa workers are a part of the current debate about our immigration policies and Wiggins is a good example of a company that relies on visa workers to fill jobs that local workers do not want. Their food safety quality control program is impressive. Although Jody explained that it was expensive to ramp up, it is very necessary to meet current food safety standards. Clint answered some audience questions about their irrigation practices and how timing of irrigation affects the quality of the watermelons. No samples, unfortunately!

Royalty Pecans

We took a drive-by tour of one of the Royalty Pecans orchards, then stopped for a short visit to the gift shop and a chance to taste-test some of their pecan products. They had an impressive array of pecan-related products in the shop and very helpful staff to answer questions. I had never seen bottled pecan cooking oil before, so now I will know to look for it in my local store. You really can't go wrong with using Texas pecans in all sorts of food.

Blue Bell Creameries

It was hard to leave the pecan sampling area, but no one wanted to miss the bus to Brenham to visit Blue Bell! We divided into three groups for our tour of the facility. My group was led by Mr. Sam Sommer, CFO of Blue Bell Creameries. The production shift was still working, so we could observe the different steps in making and packaging the ice cream. We got a sneak peek at a new flavor, but we were sworn to secrecy as to what flavor it is! During the tour, Mr. Sommer alluded to the changes that had to be made as the company went through a listeria contamination crisis in 2015. All three executives who led the tour groups talked at the end about how difficult it was to go through that experience and how they had to focus on moving forward and fix the problems so this company would not fail. That is a testament to the integrity of the company and its commitment to its employees and customers. Thankfully, they did recover and we were able to sample all the ice cream we wanted at the end of the tour. Nothing makes up for a hot Texas afternoon like a scoop of Blue Bell!

ST Genetics

We had a lengthy travel delay due to bus trouble, so we arrived late at ST Genetics. That made for a very long day for the staff who were hosting us - our thanks for being so gracious about it! Mr. Jim Hiney, Marketing Manager for ST Genetics, led a tour of their facility and a viewing of their lab. They are at the forefront of semen

sex-sorting and other genetic services for several species of animals. Their lab uses advanced equipment, that they helped develop, to sex-sort for contract customers and claim to have 95% accuracy for sex. They have also developed a genetic line of bulls for use in dairy cattle artificial insemination. They are active in many other areas of genetic testing and services for animals, too numerous to go into here, but it's safe to say they are one of the premier genetics companies in the nation. Their feed efficiency testing cattle lot was interesting to me, to see how they use feed box technology to measure each animal's feed intake and gain. As we ate the dinner they provided, Mr. Gregg BeVier showed slides about the company, the increasing population of the world and about future gains in agriculture that will come from emerging technology. Already cattle producers are using digital sensors, boluses and chips to track relevant data in cattle. Another example, among many this week, of how new technology is being used in practical ways to aid in ag production. I am not as familiar with cattle production, so to me this was a fascinating look into the future of animal production.

Challenge Works

Thursday morning began at Challenge Works. We had a fun morning of group activities and games designed to build our group and allow us to get to know each other. After being split into two groups, our leaders led us through activities designed to challenge our ability to cooperate and lead the group to solve a problem or physical challenge. At the end of each activity our leader, Kasey, would recap what she observed about the group and ask what we noticed. My group pretty quickly discovered the challenges of working in a group of people who all want to be in charge! We had to learn to listen and cooperate with others who might have more insight into the specific problem we were attempting to solve. After a picnic lunch, we moved to the high challenge courses that featured elevated obstacles that require teamwork to belay the climbers and help them safely descend. As a person with a lifelong fear of heights, I had worried for weeks about how I would handle the high challenge portion without being an embarrassment to or a drag on my team. However, the staff and my teammates were all very encouraging and positive and I was able to climb several feet higher than I have ever willingly climbed. I did not reach the top of the pole, but I consider it a personal victory nonetheless! I would never have tried this on my own initiative and I learned not to let fear stop me from trying.

RELLIS Campus Tour

Mr. Kelly Templin, Director of RELLIS, came aboard the bus to lead our tour of the campus. Located on a former WWII Air Force base, the RELLIS campus is devoted to applied research, technology development and education. The current and future facilities on this campus will lead research and training efforts in many fields for years to come. Already the Center for Infrastructure Renewal and the TEEX Training Institute, among others, are making good use of the grounds and Blinn College will soon have a large facility here. He explained that the name RELLIS comes from the Aggie Corps values of respect, excellence, leadership, loyalty, integrity and selfless service.

TALL XVI Reception and Dinner

We assembled Thursday evening at the Texas A&M AgriLife Center for a reception with area agricultural leaders, agribusiness owners and TALL Alumni. The hour we had to meet and greet was not nearly enough time to take in this group of accomplished and important people. The support for the TALL program that has been built by Dr. Jim and the alumni is impressive to behold! After opening remarks from Dr. Jim, we had a welcome from Dr. Parr Rosson, Director of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and additional comments from the President of the TALL Foundation, Mr. Jim Prewitt. Dr. Susan Ballabina, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the College of Agriculture, introduced the keynote speaker, Dr. Patrick Stover, making sure to note her respect for his leadership and the

efforts his colleagues have made to make him "more Texan". Dr. Stover is the new Vice Chancellor and Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. He told us about his early life in New York and his journey to Texas A&M. He then talked about his vision for the future of agriculture. He noted the astronomical costs associated with health care in today's world and how many chronic diseases are diet-related and preventable. His two main speaking points in addressing that problem: Nutrition and Precision. He believes that research is needed into how we can produce food that is inherently healthier, or more nutritious, and how nutrition might be customized using precision technologies to tailor each person's diet to meet their individual needs, instead of using averages. My oversimplification of his insightful remarks may not fully convey it, but he has a passion for using our vast agricultural capabilities to make a world-altering change in producing and consuming food.

After Dr. Jim briefly introduced each member of the TALL XVI cohort, we each left with our dinner hosts. Mike and Kathy Patranella, owners of Brazos Bottom Crop Care, were my gracious hosts. They teamed up with a few other hosts for a big group dinner, so in addition to the Patranellas, I was also able to meet Paul Sandel, of the Hy-Line North America LLC poultry company, and his wife Dawn Dittmar, a local attorney. A smaller, less formal setting like this leads to more in-depth discussions with our hosts about their work and our ag connections. I think these hosted dinners are a great idea and look forward to hosted dinners in future sessions.

Setting the Context: Strategy, Policy and the Fate of the Nation

Dr. David McIntyre, Director of the Integrative Center for Homeland Security at Texas A&M, started our Friday morning session with an interesting lecture about thinking, strategy, the two types of reasoning and the philosophies underlying our modern political and societal leanings. Dr. McIntyre has a long and distinguished history of service to our country, having served 30 years in the United States Army and in Homeland Security education. He had many relevant points to make, but what most stood out for me were his thoughts on how to think, which I would describe as making long term objectives, and the difference between training and education - both are important, but they are not the same. As I understood him, training deals with WHAT to do and how best to do it, while education deals with WHY and HOW to deal with something and will require research. I do not have the bandwidth to adequately summarize all he had to say, but it was powerful and helpful. I could have listened to him for hours, but unfortunately the schedule and our late start did not allow him to finish all he had prepared. His military background was obvious from how displeased he was to start late and in the wrong room - we should all strive to be as punctual and prepared as this patriot!

How to Prepare Your Organizational Culture for Industry 4.0 and the Digital World

Dr. Artur Dunal, Regional Finance Manager for Rolls-Royce Marine North America, talked to our group about preparing our workplaces for the current cyber-physical digital systems, or Industry 4.0. After illustrating for us the stages of industrial changes through history, he talked to us about the challenges facing businesses trying to integrate new technology into existing corporate culture and how we might better adapt our own workplaces to this new paradigm. He asked for audience input as to how we use digital technology now and what some of the associated challenges are. More than one TALL participant mentioned the difficulty in getting different apps or digital machines to work together and also how a digital breakdown can bring the whole operation to a standstill. Dr. Dunal showed some examples of different management styles and which ones are more workable for Industry 4.0. Very interesting ideas to ponder as I try to use the digital and/or cyber resources available to me without alienating my customers who are resistant to technology.

A Different Kind of Undercover

Dr. Jim may have saved the best for last when he scheduled Mr. Jim Olson as our final speaker of the session. All of the speakers have been thought provoking, but Mr. Olson's experiences as an undercover agent in the CIA had emotional ramifications far beyond what I had ever thought about. To me, the CIA had always seemed not quite real, as most of my exposure to it was in the movies or in spy novels. Mr. Olson gave us a real-life perspective on his recruitment into and service in the CIA. When he described the rejection and distrust that resulted when he was finally able to tell family and friends what he had secretly been doing his entire adult life, it brought tears to my eyes. We as a nation expect so much of our military and intelligence personnel and maybe never consider the consequences to their personal lives. I have tremendous respect for Mr. Olson and am so grateful for his past and continuing service to our country! He continues to teach in the Bush School of Government and had many pertinent things to say about current world events and security threats. He most passionately defended the reputation of the CIA against the attacks from the current presidential administration and reminded us that the CIA has never taken political sides, but exists for the benefit of the whole nation.

George Bush Presidential Archives and Museum

Our final treat of the session was a behind-the-scenes tour of the archives. Mr. John Blair was the tour leader for my group and he provided a fascinating look at the massive job they have to preserve, organize and protect the papers and artifacts in the Bush presidential archives. I was surprised to learn that anyone can walk in and request research time in the archives, providing they follow the rules. Mr. Blair patiently answered the many questions from our group and briefly explained his duties as an archivist. The visit to the gift section of the archives was also a treat, as the man in charge there is very enthusiastic about his job and shared some funny and informational stories. After the tour I had time to view a small portion of the museum and the Leonardo da Vinci exhibit.

After the tour, we gathered for a group photo in front of the Freedom Horse Sculpture. Dr. Jim reminded us of the tasks we needed to fulfill after the session and sent us all home eagerly anticipating Session 2 in the Panhandle.

Closing Thoughts

The variety of speakers and tours packed into just three days was mind boggling. Many of the speakers had some common points. Several mentioned how the increasing population and the increasing income in developing countries is fueling the demand for protein. Consumer uproar over GMOs and chemical use in food, and our response to that debate, was another frequent topic of discussion. Precision agriculture in crop and animal production was another hot topic, as well as water usage. Our challenge as participants in TALL is to communicate and advocate for agriculture as the nation and the world deal with these issues.

I could never have imagined how wonderful this experience was going to be. The line about "having miles to go before I sleep" certainly applies to our TALL sessions! We managed to fit some group bonding time in during the bus rides and after the scheduled activities, so I feel like I made a whole new group of friends in a very short time. I am looking forward to meeting up again in Lubbock in October.

Kassidy Martin

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TALL Session 1 – College Station, Texas

When I was accepted into the Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership program (TALL) as a member of the TALL XVI Class I had several expectations. These included meeting new friends, grow my professional network, see and learn new things, and learn how I could be a better advocate for Agriculture. I knew of the TALL program from working at the Dean of Agriculture's office in college and from hearing about it from previous cohorts. Every TALL Alumnus speaks so highly of the program and what an amazing opportunity it was. Hearing these things set my expectations high for the TALL program. July 17-20 was Session 1 and let me just say every expectation I had was far past exceeded. It is amazing how a room full of 25 TALL class members and 3 Texas Cattle Feeders Leaders can start as strangers, but with a common ground of being advocates for agriculture and becoming better professionals, we became inseparable and are ready for session 2 in October. I would like to give a recap of our Session 1 that was held in College Station, Texas.

Tuesday July 17

Session 1 started with a nice welcome from Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz who is the director of the TALL program. He congratulated us all on being selected as a cohort of Tall XVI and told us to get ready for an exciting and wonderful ride. Dr. Jim also gave us a history of the TALL program and how it is now called the Governor Dolph Briscoe, Jr. Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership program. I enjoyed hearing how the program started and how the Texas program continues to be the model program for other states and countries to follow. Dr. Jim also challenged us to be innovators, advocates for agriculture, and to focus on the future of agriculture. Dr. Jeff Ripley with the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service then welcomed us to College Station and to Texas A&M

University. We then ended the introduction section with cohorts introducing themselves. When everyone was introducing themselves I thought to myself, there is no way I will remember all these names, however we bonded so well throughout the week that I actually did remember them all!

After these introductions we got to hear from Mr. Todd Swick with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). He gave a presentation on TDCJ Agriculture Today with Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Logistics. I knew the TDCJ had some farming operations, but I had no idea the scale or variety of operations that they had. Their goal is to reduce costs and tax burdens with state owned land. The system has cattle, horses, 31 varieties of fruits and vegetables, an apiary, cotton gins, hay operation, swine operation, along with cotton and grain growing operations. Mr. Swick stated that the system produces 40% of the prison meals at 70% of the typical costs. This fact shows how efficient the system is at feeding the inmates at minimal costs to tax payers. I think it is beneficial that the inmates work in all these operations, as it teaches them a skill for employment when they get released from prison. The system does not sell anything to the public, but any excess food gets distributed to food banks across the state of Texas.

After Mr. Swick's presentation and answering our questions, we loaded the charter bus and headed to the Texas A&M Forest Service. I thought we would hear about East Texas and what the service does with trees. I was proven very wrong! Mr. Tom Boggus, who is the State Forester and Director of the Forest Service, welcomed us. Mr. Boggus had a map of where our entire class was located throughout the state, which was neat to see how spread out we all were. He told us about the current fire season and that they were currently monitoring a fire on the Waggoner Ranch that day. He showed us on the virtual screen where all the planes and tanks were, and the containment percentage. Mr. Boggus then introduced us to Mr. Mark Stanford who is the Associate Director and Forest Resource Protection. Mr. Stanford talked through some of the most famous wild

fires in Texas history, including the Bastrop fire and the panhandle fires. We talked about weather systems that enhance and guarantee fire conditions, specifically called the Southern Plains Wildfire Outbreak, which only happens in Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Mr. Stanford also talked about their new Ranch Management Preparedness Plan Program that was spurred after the 2017 panhandle fires. With this comes digital planning of land from landowners to help fire departments know locations of gates, fence and lock types, and other pertinent information during a wildfire situation. Our TALL group was so engaged in this topic that we had to skip two presenters. However, we did get to hear from Ms. Gretchen Riley who showed us the Texas Forest Service website and how interactive and personalized it can be. We were then able to see the Forest Service Training “sand box”. This training tool is virtual and made with crushed pecan shells. The Forest service projects a terrain onto the sand and can mold the sand to reflect the area. They can then change weather conditions, containment methods, and backfire locations, as to which methods would put out a fire the fastest. The technology the Forest Service is using is truly incredible.

After the Forest Service visit we loaded the bus and went back to the hotel to prepare for our Etiquette training and meal with Ms. Susan Quiring. Ms. Quiring made our dinner interactive and a great learning session. We learned how to dress, proper ways to pass items around the table, proper way to eat, and how to communicate with the staff without talking. Our meal was wonderful, and I learned new things, especially where to put my purse so it does not trip anyone. After dinner Dr. Jim released us for the evening to our rooms, where we were able to get to know our roommates and get some rest after a great first day.

Wednesday July 18

Our second day started bright and early with a wonderful breakfast at our hotel, The Stella. Our first presenter of the day was Dr. Guy Sheppard with the Texas A&M

Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL). Dr. Sheppard talked about Protecting Animal and Human Health through Diagnostics. Dr. Sheppard gave a fascinating statistic that one in seven Texans work in an agricultural related job. I think this shows how strong the agriculture industry is in Texas, and how we all need to be advocates for the industry. The goal of the TVMDL is “One Health – animal, human, and environmental health”. The TVMDL is doing this through multiple ways, and we were able to focus on a few. The TVMDL is who does drug testing for all market stock show animals as well as racing animals including horses and dogs. They do testing and results readings for veterinarians who send in test samples for diseases and diagnosing. One of the advanced technologies that the TVMDL is implementing, is that veterinarians can send pictures of microscope samples and the department will text them back the findings from the samples. I thought this was beneficial, especially to rural veterinarians who live far from the TVMDL locations throughout the state. The TVMDL was a part of the A&M system that I did not know much about, but now see the value that it provides to the state.

Our next scheduled speaker, Dr. Lunt with the Texas A&M AgriLife Research Department, was unable to attend. However, Dr. Jim was kind enough to give the presentation, so we still had the opportunity to learn about the AgriLife Research system. This presentation was titled “How will we feed the world in 2050?” It is hard to imagine that we truly are close enough to 2050 for this to be a concern. We all hear that the population is increasing, but until I saw the charts and graphs in Dr. Lunt’s presentation I did not realize the multitude of this increase. We discussed that there are three main drivers of change that we face today, which include: Global food security, Water demand (quality and quantity), and the demographic changes (e.g. attitude changes, political risk, and land use). We also discussed how hunger and armed conflict go hand in hand. If we want to eliminate the conflict in starving countries, we must figure out how to feed them first. Dr. Lunt’s presentation was a real eye opener as to the issues we will continue to face not only in agriculture, but in the world.

We then had the opportunity to hear from Mr. Luis Ribera who is with the Center of North American Studies in the Texas A&M Agricultural Economics department. With Mr. Ribera we discussed the importance of agriculture issues and trade, specifically China, Brazil, and NAFTA. One of the discussion points was that American farmland is decreasing, but that Brazil has the opportunity to double if not triple their farm production without cutting down any trees. We then moved into a trade discussion. Mr. Ribera pointed out that more than 1/3 of American farm income comes from overseas trading income. I see this number increasing, especially since not only is the population increasing, but also Mr. Ribera pointed out that this increased population in our export countries has money to spend, especially China. When they have this increased income they buy quality food such as American beef. This shows how important trade is for American producers. We also discussed how important importing is for America, especially for fresh produce. With our limited growing seasons, but a demand for year round supply we must import a large number of fresh produce, especially from Mexico and China. Our last discussion was about NAFTA. We discussed that the original purpose of NAFTA has been achieved, but the question is will it continue. One thing that Mr. Ribera pointed out with NAFTA and the impact to America is with auto parts. The majority of auto parts are made in Mexico, and if tariffs are put into place on Mexican items, we can expect a large increase in a common expense for all Americans. I really enjoyed Mr. Ribera's presentation and look forward to sharing his information with my coworkers at Central Texas Farm Credit. We need to encourage our producers to continue to be advocates for our entire industry and a healthy trade economy.

After Mr. Ribera finished his presentation and answered our questions we went to ABC Equipment in Snook where we were treated to a wonderful lunch. At this lunch we were able to interact with local producers and agribusinesses in the Brazos Valley area. The Wiggins family was a small part of the producers at this lunch, but they were our

next host. We went next door to their watermelon-shipping warehouse. The Wiggins' were generous enough to discuss their farming operation, which includes growing six and a half watermelons per year throughout the state. They talked about the issues they face not only in the farming sector, but also the shipping sector. We were then able to go out and see their workers harvesting watermelons in one of the fields.

After getting a dose of watermelon farming, we loaded up and went to the famous Blue Bell Creameries in Brenham, Texas. We were split into three groups and got a special behind the scenes tour of the facility. I had the opportunity to go on a tour with Mr. Mark Patranella who is the manager of purchasing and receiving. Mr. Patranella was kind enough to answer all of our questions, including the changes and procedures implemented after the Listeria outbreak. I think we can all take a lesson in perseverance from Blue Bell Creameries and the true love that they have to their product and employees. We also got a special treat of Blue Bell ice cream before we left.

After a slight bus delay, but excellent bonding with our cohorts and Dr. Jim, we loaded up the bus and went to STgenetics in Navasota. This was a business that I had never heard of, but was extremely impressed with. It is a first class facility full of top of the line technology, but it is also full of extremely knowledgeable innovators. Mr. Jim Hiney, who is their marketing manager, gave us a tour of the whole facility, and walked us through the process of sperm sorting. We talked about how this industry is taking off not only in livestock but also on wild game ranches. Dr. Rene Ochoa who is in charge of the Latin America Market for STgenetics then hosted us to a great supper and a presentation. This presentation included how STgenetics is made up of multiple entities that all have a part in the entire genetic production system. We also talked about how the population is not only increasing, but it is becoming more urban each day. I was so fascinated by the technology and continued advancements that STgenetics is making, and is a new sector of agriculture. After STgenetics, we loaded up

and Dr. Jim told us to rest up for the Texas A&M Challenge Course the next day. This first full day was full of information and sleep came easy!

Thursday July 19

We started our second full day with a great breakfast and loaded up the bus ready for a challenge at the Texas A&M Challenge Course. We did activities as a group to start off with to learn more about one another. We then split into two groups to focus on team building activities. In these challenges we learned our own personal strengths and weaknesses, but also how to be a team player. I think these challenges really helped us become a closer group and focus on accomplishing our goals. We then were able to do “high ropes challenges”. In these we split into four small groups. We each had a task and were all there to support one another, as people tested themselves to do more than they thought they could. It was a hot day, but beneficial to become a better person and a better group. After this our group was closer than before, and became a family.

After the challenge course we all loaded up on the bus and went on a tour of the Brazos Valley Expo Center. We learned how the Expo Center has grown it’s facilities and continues to increase the number of events it hosts each year. We then went on a tour of the RELLIS campus with Mr. Kelly Templin. We learned how this new facility is becoming a top of the line facility for research and experiments. We went on a bus tour of the whole facility and were able to see where buildings would be located, testing facilities, and shooting ranges for trainings. It was hard to hear Mr. Templin on the bus, but I have enjoyed what I have learned from the personal research I did, especially the core of everything they do is Innovation, Education, and Transformation. This core goes along with Dr. Jim’s challenge on focusing on the future.

Thursday night we were treated to a reception hosted by Capital Farm Credit. During this reception we were able to meet TALL alumnus, supporters, and local businesses that would be our dinner hosts that evening. Dr. Patrick Stover, who is the new Vice Chancellor and Dean of Agriculture, was our key speaker. It was interesting to hear Dr. Stover's vision of the college and where he sees the future of Agriculture. Dr. Stover talked about how important food quality would be in the future and how it would impact our trade sector. I was then treated to supper with Mr. Ted Conover and Mr. Kenneth Threlkeld who are TALL supporters in the East Texas area. They also help organize our East Texas location visit, which will happen in January 2020.

Friday July 20

Friday morning, we made our way to the George Bush Library and Museum. Our first session was with Dr. David McIntyre who is the Director of the Integrative Center for Homeland Security at Texas A&M University. Dr. McIntyre's presentation was titled "Setting the Context: Strategy, Policy, and the Fate of the Nation". I appreciated that Dr. McIntyre challenged us as a group to think about our thinking. Are we thinking about the present term only, or are we focusing on the future as well. This point went in hand with Dr. Jim's challenge of being innovators and thinking about the future of agriculture. Dr. McIntyre talked about thinking in layers. This included understanding, remembering, applying with research, analyzing, evaluating, creating, communicating, and collaborating. This is a concept that I can use in my daily job by focusing on a whole concept and not just a few facts.

Our next presenter was Dr. Artur Dunal who is the Regional Finance Manager for Rolls-Royce Marine North America. Dr. Dunal's presentation was titled "Industry 4.0 and the Digital World". Dr. Dunal discussed how we are in the 4th industrial revolution titled Cyber Physical Systems. This presentation was interactive with our TALL group on how each of our daily jobs have been changed with the cyber world. We not only talked

about the strengths and struggles that we face in our industry, but also where we see the future of the agricultural industry going. It was interesting to hear how advanced the agricultural field has come in anything from finance, dairies, nurseries, and land conservation. This was a great opportunity to learn what my other Cohorts do on a daily basis in the agriculture industry.

Our last presenter for the day was Mr. Jim Olson who is a Senior Lecturer at The Bush School of Government, but is also a past CIA spy. I was so engulfed in Mr. Olson's talk that I did not even write notes. It was interesting to hear his life story of being a spy and how it molded his life. It also made me realize there is a group of special individuals who are risking their lives and relationships daily, in order to protect our country by being international spies. I look forward to reading Mr. Olson's book titled "Fair Play – The Moral Dilemmas of Spying".

We then made our way to the Bush Library. Here we had a behind the scenes tour in 2 smaller groups. Here we were able to see the library of all the documents from the Bush Administration. Mr. Blair, who was my group leader, walked us through the process of researching at the library. He also showed us to the room that held all the artifacts from the Presidential and Vice-Presidential terms of George Bush. From the windows we were able to see a few things including sculptures. But my favorite artifact that was talked about was a sled given to Mrs. Bush. She had a sledding accident and a friend of theirs made her a personal sled with a seatbelt in it. It made me laugh and remember that even our Presidents and their wives are people too. We ended the Bush Library with a group picture in front of the Freedom Horse Sculpture.

Session 1 of my TALL experience was absolutely incredible. This session was filled with education from all sectors, team building with an excellent group of cohorts, and networking with members of the ag industry. I was told when I was accepted into TALL that I would love every minute, and that has held true. I am looking forward to Session

2 in the panhandle. I grew up in Tulia so I am excited to be heading home, but know there is so much to learn while I am there. I am also looking forward to being with my TALL cohorts again, not only for the friendships but also the things I learn from them personally and professionally. Thank you to all of our sponsors and Dr. Jim for an excellent program and opportunity.

Travis Britt (#2)
TALL XVI
Session 1-College Station, TX
July 17-20, 2018

TALL Session 1 kicked off in College Station, TX where we would study Brazos Valley Agriculture and meet local leaders while getting familiar with our new classmates. Within 1 hour of arriving and meeting my new cohort, I realized that there is a group of people in my industry that are just like me. We began with everyone introducing themselves and telling who they were and how they were involved in agricultural. After introductions, it became evident that nobody was familiar with my industry so I would bring a unique point of view to our discussions. Following introductions, Dr. Jim gave us a summary of the week and brought to our attention that we are very fortunate to be involved in the TALL program. In fact, 400 people applied and 25 made the cut. He then explained the industry and gave us a few statistics to grow on. The one stat that really stuck with me was the average age of the American farmer is 59, but the average age of the TALL XVI cohort is 38. I perceived this statistic as saying that our industry is getting older in age, but we are the future. We have 30+ years to contribute and change the industry.

After introductions we started the session with Todd Swick. Todd Swick is the Program Specialist for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDJC). His program specializes in rehabilitation by giving inmates a second chance and an opportunity to work. They believe that this program will instill discipline and ethics in these prisoners and prepare them for life upon their release. In addition to this, they see the program as an opportunity to help the prison system reduce costs by providing the prison with its source of food. The original motto of the work program was “ Fear, Force, & Leather”, and as you can imagine this got out of hand over time. As time progressed they began to change and move to a “No Work, No Eat” motto. The program is treated like a true business and reviewed every year for its profitability. TDJC owns 128,292 acres, with 37,000 of that being cultivated, 69,000 of pasture land, and 9,000 of contract farming and grazing. They operate on a \$58 million dollar budget and pride themselves on 75% return on investment on the money given to them. After this talk I changed my opinion of these work programs. I was under the assumption that they were small, poorly managed and more of side project for the system. Quite the contrary, this program is generating an overwhelming amount of food for the prison system and reducing the amount money needed to operate.

The next stop was the Texas A&M Forestry Service, previously Texas Forest Service. I had no idea how much day to day management went on inside this office and how impactful they are to our land. Tom Boggus led the meeting and gave us a summary of who they were and why they are here. He went on to explain that there are 3 reasons for more frequent wildfires in our state: climactic change, people moving to fire prone areas, and finally change in land use. Believe it or

not, Texas leads national disaster rates, over California and Florida. Mark Stanford then took the lead and explained a number of facts and changes in our climate. One of the most powerful things they can do is predict and react due to modern technology. With certain technology they have been able to identify new weather systems that are impactful, one of them being the Southern Plains Effect. The Southern Plains Effect is one of the most dangerous weather events that can happen in Texas, as this is an uncontrollable weather event that cannot be contained. It is a combination of low humidity, high heat, dryness and windy conditions, thus creating a “perfect storm”. This hit home for me because this is the weather event that fueled the powerful fires in Bastrop in 2011. Mark then explained to us how they support the local fire departments by not telling them what to do. In fact their first purpose is to support and provide back up to the local fire department, they want local responders to get all the credit. Lastly he taught us about a new pilot program called the Ranch Management Preparedness Plan. This plan also has an App and focuses on planning, preparedness and assistance. This plan would allow the VFD to respond to a call on your property and while being dispatched they could access a database that tells them everything they need to know about your property, but more importantly what’s important to you. Example, a farmer could put in his profile to consider his fence line a priority over his house or barn, or even something as simple as a gate code or gate instructions. Technology plays a huge part in their industry for forecasting, they have even developed a 3D modeling system of topography to help plan how to attack a fire when necessary. In summary, it was evident that this team focused more on planning, reacting, and strategizing rather than trying to manage every single detail. It was clear that their model of managing rather than doing helped the branches below them execute efficiently.

We then concluded the night with Susan Quiring training us on etiquette and social awareness in formal situations. We learned about etiquette at the dinner table and how to present ourselves to a group. Although the etiquette lessons were impactful, I reacted the most to 2 different things she said. First and foremost, be nice and inclusive of others in social situations. More importantly be socially aware of who is in the room and react accordingly. Second, adapt to your situation accordingly. In some instances certain rules apply and others they don’t, but it’s crucial to identify these situations and be able to react when needed. In summary, being discrete and aware of your situation is crucial to how people perceive you.

Day 2 was led with Dr. Guy Sheppard talking to us about the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostics Laboratory. The TVMDL is dedicated to providing vet services, testing, consultation, and supporting research. They have a vision of “One Health”: Animal, Human and Environment. As a group, they realize and actively address the fact that we could be vastly outnumbered if we have a giant animal disease outbreak. So, how do they react; technology. Their newest technology is Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) technology, where they identify and replicate organisms very quickly to react in a short amount of time. They are also using cell phone cameras to carry out Digital Cytology to view and provide detailed pictures in a short amount of time.

Veterinary practices have nothing to do with my industry, but it is again a reminder that technology is leading our industry and that with technology we can react faster than before.

We then transitioned into the world's need for more food. Dr. Jim gave us a presentation and challenged us to think about how we were going to feed the world in the future. Some of the drivers of change are global food security, water demands and demographic changes. We are seeing the need for more food across different social classes because disposable income has increased at the middle class level. With an increase in disposable income, traditionally lower classes are now earning more money, buying different categories of food, and this is happening at a global level. Water demands are also changing because water use is going up as well as wastage, especially at the urban level. In fact water usage at the ag level has decreased while water usage at the urban level is steadily increasing.

Our morning session concluded with Dr. Luis Ribera, lecturing to us on the Importance of Agricultural trade. He led with a powerful metric of U.S. imports vs. U.S. exports and reported that in 2017 the U.S. exports valued around 138 billion while imports valued around 121 billion. He agreed with and supported the previous lecture and said that one of our biggest global changes is people have more money and lower classes are beginning to transfer from grain based diets to more expensive protein based diets. Without getting too far in to politics he explained some of the strategies that our current politicians and President are carrying out, and reminded us that 25% of the world's money is in the U.S., therefore we have negotiating power. We then discussed the argument of updating the NAFTA agreements and that NAFTA fulfilled its objectives which were to increase trades and investments and reduce tariffs. But more importantly he reminded us that agriculture only accounts for a portion of the NAFTA agreements, therefore we have to consider the current negotiations more holistically and not get stuck in our own world. He taught us about Brazil and how they are excited about the future in terms of trade, as they have gotten more efficient with their farmland and plantings are increasing. We ended the meeting again discussing NAFTA and the need to update the agreement because of its age and that the world has changed, therefore we need to update the policy to match the current world's needs.

Next was lunch with local growers and a visit to the Wiggins family watermelon farm. John Giesenshlag led our lunch meeting and reminded us of the importance of community and giving back. We then toured the Wiggins watermelon farm and learned a little about watermelon production. They face the same issues as us; weather, labor and costs. Interestingly enough most of their labor is from Haiti and is contracted through H2A. They have an impressive watermelon operation and ship around 100,000 watermelons every year to local businesses. We then left and visited Royalty Pecan Farm for a quick stop and headed to Blue Bell Creameries. Blue Bell was impressive and it was evident that they have adapted and learned from their mistakes. More importantly, it was evident that they support the local community with jobs, employing around 700 people. They have a night crew dedicated to scrubbing and sanitizing the

facility every night to avoid contamination. After Blue Bell, we concluded the evening at ST Genetics. ST Genetics is a company that specializes in collecting and sorting semen. Their technology is unbelievable and sets them apart. They have the ability to collect semen, sort the semen by size, shape and separate embryos so that the customer has a higher chance of conception. Their facilities are top notch as well as their staff. They reminded me of the potential of technology to accomplish a job. Both Blue Bell and ST Genetics were clear examples of companies that have adapted LEAN techniques. I noticed at the Blue Bell Creamery there was very little wasted movement amongst workers. Everything was labeled and had a specific tool right by the job. ST Genetics was not as evident at the first glance, but even in a lab you could identify an assembly line and stations.

We started day 3 with recreation and team building at Challenge Works. We played various games that focused on team building and leadership. I walked away from this knowing every team members name and more importantly how they react under pressure. Great exercise and a lot of fun. After Challenge Works we did a campus tour of the new RELLIS Campus where we drove around and looked at all the new construction. Wow, Texas A&M is gearing up to dominate. The facilities are top notch and so is the vision. RELLIS campus will combine Blinn Campus, academia, experimentation, transportation, and infrastructure solutions all on one campus. We ended the day with a banquet and dinner with local leaders. I was paired up with the Scarmardo family and Dr. Charlie Graham. What a great dinner, and learning experience. Mark Scarmardo preached to us about hard work and customer service. I might even be able to do some business with him in the future.

The morning session of our last day was held on the George Bush campus. Dr. David McIntyre spoke about thought processes, organization and planning. He explained to us that training teaches us the best solution to a known problem while education forces us to learn and understand the “how and why”. His lecture sat home with me because he actually sympathized with the world and said that our generation is challenged because we are stuck in the middle of conflicting ways of thought and are forced to choose a side. He challenged us to always measure, evaluate, and think. His lecture summary was: think, have a plan, measure what you can count, consider cause and effect, identify the real problem and strategize, establish boundaries, try to achieve consistency, and always develop strong policies. Dr. Artur Dunal then lectured on Industry 4.0, i.e. the fourth industrial revolution. He said that this industrial revolution is unique in that we are now living in a world of sensors and constant feedback. With this technology we have created a world of business where companies can dominate a sector and not own any real part of that particular industry. Examples: UBER dominates transportation and doesn’t own a vehicle, Air B&B specializes in housing and rental and doesn’t own any real estate. Our morning session wrapped up with Jim Olson slapping us in the face with reality. The first sentence of his speech, “We will be attacked again, it will happen on U.S. Soil, and it will happen in our life time”. What an eye opening introduction. Jim is a retired CIA spy and spoke with us about his

experiences working for the CIA. I believe Jim's message was the world is not what it seems on the surface, there are many levels to the world that make it run and you don't always have to be the loudest and draw the most attention to be impactful. Be discrete, hold your nerve and always choose good people to surround yourself. We then headed to George Bush Library for a tour.

In conclusion, TALL session 1 was a great experience. I realized that there are people in this world that care as much about our industry as I do. In addition to this, I have now been exposed to many other sides of our industry that I don't consider when I talk about agriculture, i.e. law, banking, insurance. I believe the most impactful lecture I heard was from Dr. Luis Ribera on agricultural economics. I have very little experience in economics, but my industry is facing major changes and challenges as we speak. His insight on change and adaptation of current policies to match today's realities was eye opening. We are in the middle of trying to grow and expand the pecan industry while current policies are changing and this session shed light on many issues that are being talked about today.