

Matt Okeson #15

TALL XVI

Session 4 – Washington, DC, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York

April 6-13, 2019

Session Theme: National Government: Issues and Politics



Session four of TALL XVI took the group outside the borders of Texas to the Northeast, where the cohort learned about the federal government and agriculture in various states. Although I had lived and visited DC and New York many of times, I was very excited for this session and the agenda. Not only did we have the chance to see many of the traditional tourist attractions, but we also got an inside look into cities and industries that I never had a chance to see before.

Inside Congress

A portion of our time spent in Washington, DC was rightfully focused on Congress and the various committees tied to the industries represented in our cohort. Our first congressional speaker was Ms. Jennifer Yezak, Deputy Clerk of the House Committee on Agriculture. Ms. Yezak welcomed us to DC and provided historical insight into the Committee, which is nearly 200 years old.

Not only is the Committee one of the oldest committees in the government's history, but it is also responsible for putting forth legislation that impacts constituents both urban and rural alike. Mr. Keith Jones, Senior Staffer for the House Committee on Agriculture, explained that the committee's work on farm bills have implications for Americans everywhere. Since the farm bill contains provisions for both rural and urban interests, the process depends on a coalition of members from both parties to ensure passage. In what seems highly unlikely in today's extremely partisan environment, the House Committee on Agriculture succeeds due to a lack of partisanship, respect, and comradery of its members.

Congressman Mike Conaway, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Agriculture, further emphasized the importance of relationships within DC. During his address to the cohort, Congressman Conaway explained how the committee was able to pass the 2018 farm bill with a record number of votes – 369 in favor of the bill. However, bipartisanship and compromise should not come at the expense of values. While there are many issues that challenge our nation, one of the most difficult to address is the future of self-governance. In a very passionate discussion, Congressman Conaway explained we must not lose sight of our moral and religious beliefs, especially when they are being challenged today more than ever.

Mr. Bart Fisher and Mr. Matt Schertz from the House Committee on Agriculture further emphasized the importance of relationships and advocacy, especially in a hyper-partisan environment. Attitudes in DC have changed drastically, even more so recently than since my time on Capitol Hill ten years ago. Both parties today are much more radical and have "gone to their corners". As a result, members of Congress don't always share information which can lead to uninformed votes. It's crucial industries have advocates in DC that work to inform Congress. When members are informed, they do not vote wrong!

The dynamics of the House of Representatives and the House Committee on Agriculture are not unique to that chamber of Congress. Mr. James Glueck, Senior Policy Advisor to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, echoed many of the same sentiments as our speakers from the House. He also emphasized the importance of seeking to understand one another and trying to see issues from different perspectives. When approaching an issue, thinking about it in terms of what it means to others helps one develop a broader perspective and takes others' ideas into consideration. By doing so, meaningful legislation can be crafted, passed, and enforced.

The Executive Branch

Broadening perspectives is not only something Congress is working on; the White House has also placed emphasis on communication and education of Congress on key issues on President Trump's agenda. The cohort had the opportunity to visit the White House and meet with a panel of Trump staffers who discussed the administration's outreach efforts and the importance of doing so. Ms. Brooke Rollins, Assistant to President Trump, explained how Congress changed drastically during the last election as many new members were elected to Congress. With this change, new members lack knowledge on many key issues on Trump's agenda. Despite outside interference from news channels and partisanship, the administration has focused on sharing information with new members and emphasizing the importance of policy. In doing so, the administration has been able to develop key relationships with new and existing members of Congress alike.

However, it is not solely the White House who is advocating for issues on the Trump agenda. Other offices within the administration also play a role in these efforts. Throughout our time in DC, the cohort also heard from staffers of various executive offices. Mr. Thomas Mills and Ms. Jess Kramer from the Environmental Protection Agency updated the cohort on the administration's efforts to develop new common-sense water regulations. The new regulations are focused on simplifying the code and eliminating unnecessary laws. In addition, the EPA is also focused on deregulation and implementing laws that are rooted in scientific facts, that are legally sound, and that are practical.

The administration is not only focused on simplifying law and deregulation. Another major area of focus for the administration is trade. Mr. Patrick Kirwan of the Department of Commerce Trade Promotion Committee explained the importance of trade – not only is it an opportunity to expand U.S. businesses, but it also can be used as a tool for foreign policy and national security. While previous administrations have been focused on multilateral agreements, the Trump administration instead has been focused on bilateral agreements that benefit the United States. This has resulted in hard stances with a few countries, such as China, and has unfavorably impacted U.S. exports.

Other offices within the administration have been focused on new opportunities to fill voids created by tough decisions made on trade. For example, the Department of Agriculture

boosted support of trade programs in order to identify opportunities to expand U.S. trade. Mr. Clay Hamilton of the Foreign Agriculture Service explained that the USDA recently created a new undersecretary position specific to agricultural trade. In addition, the Foreign Agriculture Service has been working with certain geographies, such as the European Union, to build trade capacity by negotiating in science-based trends and eliminating unnecessary barriers to trade. Through these efforts, the USDA is helping to reduce the China's percent market share of U.S. exports and grow exports to other regions of the world.

Other Organizations Outside Government

While Congress focuses on developing policy and the executive branch administers policy, several industry organizations exist in DC to help influence and guide decisions made by the federal government. Throughout the week, the cohort heard from some of these organizations such as Combest-Sell & Associates, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Farm Bureau. Some organizations, such as the Heritage Foundation, cover a broad spectrum of issues and promote a limited federal government. On the other hand, organizations, such as Combest-Sell and the American Farm Bureau, represent specific industries and trade groups to promote their clients' interests. Regardless of the organization's core interests, each group emphasized their focus on advocacy, education, communication, and outreach to the cohort during our meetings.

More Than Just Politics

Throughout our time in DC, the cohort also had the opportunity to experience the city and its great history. Our first evening in the city included a tour of the monuments after dark. While I had been to and seen the monuments many times, it was great to take them in on a cool spring evening. The peace and calmness at the monuments at night was also very surreal and enjoyable too. I truly felt a connection to our nation's history and a wave of American pride come over me.

In addition to the monuments, we also had an opportunity to take in some of the cultural aspects of DC as well. During our free day, we ventured over to the Tidal Basin for the annual Cherry Blossom Festival. Our visit to DC luckily coincided with peak bloom of the cherry blossoms, which I had never had the opportunity to see before. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and learned a great deal about the history of the cherry blossoms and the close relationship the U.S. has with Japan. The cohort also had the opportunity to take in a show at Ford's Theatre, the location of President Lincoln's assassination. Not only did we see a great production of *Into the Woods*, but we also had the opportunity to walk through the museum connected to the theatre. I was very excited to see a show in Ford's Theatre and found it to be one of the highlights of our DC experience.

A Quick Stop in Maryland

After a few days within the city limits, the cohort next spent some time in more rural areas between DC and New York City. Just a short bus ride outside of the city, our first stop was Broom's Bloom Dairy in Maryland. Founded in 1726, the ninth-generation family farm not only milks cows but also sells a variety of dairy, eggs, and meats in their general store. The Dallam family explained how the dairy business is undergoing tremendous consolidation, and many farms such as Broom's Bloom have forced to become a niche offering or go bankrupt. While I have heard this from many of my contacts in the industry, it was very eye opening to see it firsthand in the Northeast.

Over a delicious lunch complete with farm-fresh ice cream, the cohort also heard from Mr. Will Amoss regarding Maryland land preservation programs. Mr. Amoss explained how the county land preservation programs have been influential in keeping in land in agricultural production. The programs, which have a long waitlist, have more applicants than the program can fund. Why are these so popular? The programs favor agriculture and discourages urban development, keeping the DC urban sprawl at bay.

A Tour Through Amish Country

Maryland is not the only rural region in the Northeast challenged by urban sprawl and new ways of living. During our drive through the Pennsylvania countryside, the cohort had the opportunity to visit the Riehl Farm in Amish country. Mr. Sam Riehl spoke to the cohort, explaining what exactly Amish living is and debunking many myths some of us had heard about the Amish lifestyle. He also explained to the cohort how advances in modern living impact Amish life. While the Amish people see the need for technological advancement to preserve their way of life, they still protect the guiding principles of their culture too.

The Amish people are not the only ones concerned about protecting their way of life. Amish country is not only preserved but respected by the state of Pennsylvania. Secretary of Agriculture for the state of Pennsylvania Russell Redding explained to the cohort the importance of diverse agriculture for the state and the critical role the Amish play in Pennsylvania's economy. Not only do the Amish contribute to the state's agriculture economy, but they also bring in many tourism dollars. Secretary Redding also expressed the importance of educating citizens on where their food comes from and the importance of agriculture.

The Big Apple

The need for education and explaining the importance of agriculture extends beyond state borders. Upon our arrival into New York City, our first visit was to Mosner Family Brands – a wholesale meat company in the New York metro area. Mr. Ben Mosner explained to the cohort one of his biggest challenges as a businessman is the lack of education. Not only do consumers not understand where food comes from, but many retailers lack knowledge to better assist consumers with their purchases. This has caused challenge for Mosner Family

Brands as many butchers and consumers alike don't understand where meat originates. These challenges are only becoming more pronounced, especially as more retailers are moving to case-ready meats and butchers are less common.

Lack of education is not the only challenge food companies face with urban populations. In many cities like New York, companies struggle with efficiently delivering products in the "last mile". Baldor Specialty Foods knows this challenge very well and has worked to address in many ways. In order to combat the nearly \$350,000 in parking tickets annually, Baldor has worked to optimize their routes through the New York City boroughs. By utilizing technology to complement their human workforce, Baldor has been able to streamline delivery routes and reduce delivery times so trucks are not sitting for long periods of time. In addition, Baldor focuses on sustainability, striving to reduce food waste and reducing the amount of food that ends up in landfills. By doing so, Baldor can fulfill their priority of feeding people first.

Feeding people first is a priority for many companies in the New York City area, as well as numerous non-profit organizations. During our time in the Big Apple, the cohort had the opportunity to visit the Community Kitchen of West Harlem. At the Community Kitchen, staffers focus on feeding people with dignity as well as giving them choice. Through the Harlem facility, Community Kitchen distributes over 100,000 meals a month to the borough. The Community Kitchen not only provides meals to the community though. In addition, they also provide several services for seniors, plan activities, and assist with benefits forms. I was quite surprised to hear that Community Kitchen not only feeds the homeless; in fact, there are several citizens who are housed but struggle to pay their bills and shop for groceries. Food security is not just a concern for those who are homeless anymore.

Upon leaving Harlem, the cohort then headed to Manhattan where we met with individuals from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The Port Authority is responsible for regulating the seaport but also airports and bus terminals. Established in 1921, the Port Authority now manages the largest port in the East. The landlocked port currently struggles with capacity today as nearly 85% of cargo passing through remains within 75 miles of the port. Contrary to my initial belief, the port does not have much agricultural activity. In fact, there are very few exports, and less than 15% of import activity pertains to agriculture.

While visiting the Port Authority, the cohort also had the opportunity to hear from Kate Cox, Editor, and Joe Fassler, Deputy Editor, of The New Food Economy. The publication is focused on providing fair, balanced, and accurate messaging between the food industry and eaters. While many publications focus either specifically on industry and trade or eating, there has been a disconnect between the two. That's where The New Food Economy focuses. Ms. Cox explained to the cohort her major challenge is identifying industry contacts willing to talk to media. The cohort had a lively conversation about this, as many members of the group felt like they have been burned by media in the past. However, Ms. Cox discussed how her publication does not take a side, but rather only focuses on the facts in a clear and concise manner from which readers can draw their own conclusions. One thing was certain – we all agreed that

agriculture needs more advocacy, and there is no one better to do that than those involved in the industry on a daily basis.

Beyond the City Limits

After spending some time in the city, the cohort was eager to get back out to more rural areas, and we had the opportunity to spend some time in upstate New York visiting a few agricultural operations. The first visit we made was to DeBuck Sod Farm. Mr. Leonard and Mr. Greg DeBuck toured the cohort through their facility and provided a great overview of the sod industry. Having never been to a sod farm, I learned quite a bit from this visit. Sod farming is very seasonal, with planting occurring twice a year in April and August. However, harvest cannot occur until 12 to 18 months later. Sod is harvested when ordered and must be laid the day it is cut. As a result, sod is only shipped less than 100 miles away from the farm. When harvested, the sod is cut about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick to minimize the amount of topsoil lost. With rich soil containing upwards of 80% organic matter, I can understand why they try and keep as much of it as possible on the farm!

Right down the road from the DeBucks was another operation that spoke to soil conditions and the challenges it has had for their business. At the Ruskiewicz Onion Farm, the cohort heard from Mr. Paul Ruskiewicz, a 4th generation farmer. During the visit, he explained to the cohort that changing soil conditions have caused many farmers in the area to change their business models. In fact, many farmers are looking at new crops such as hemp in order to survive. Hearing about the challenges faced by onion farming, I drew many parallels to that of the potato industry. Soil and weather are two of the biggest factors in production, and any variation from ideal conditions will cause variability in crop performance.

Another operation that relies heavily on crop performance as part of their business is Kelder Farm. The cohort had the opportunity to visit the agritourism operation and meet with Mr. John Kelder. Mr. Kelder explained to the cohort the importance of their farm producing as much produce as possible in order to support the “pick your own” operation. In addition, the community can also buy a share of the farm’s yield and receive fresh produce weekly during harvest. Through their initiatives, the Kelders are not only providing locally grown produce to their community, but they are also helping educate people from more urban areas about agriculture.

The cohort’s final stop in upstate New York was to Crist Orchards, where we met with Ms. Jenny Crist Kohn and toured the family’s orchard. Throughout the tour, I was very surprised to see just how manual of a process maintaining and harvest apples is! During harvest, apples are handpicked by over 100 seasonal laborers. In the off season, the orchard requires 50 full time staffers to maintain the operation. Harvest begins in August and continues through May, when over 230,000 trees will be picked. Once harvested, apples are stored in large bins like what we use for potatoes until it is time for packing. During packing, apples are rinsed in chlorinated water, sorted based on color and defects, and packed into weighed sacks.

The sacks are then sold to retailers for fresh apple offerings. Culls are sold to the cider industry for use in manufacturing various apple cider beverages. I really enjoyed the opportunity to see an apple orchard and learn a little bit about how they operate – drawing many parallels to industries that I have work with in the past.

Our time spent in the Northeast was my favorite experience to date with the TALL program. It was great to get out beyond the borders of our state and see how agriculture varies in other parts of the country. More importantly, it was refreshing to see a number of similarities we share despite our geographic disparity. One thing is for certain – regardless of the industry, where we are located, or our role, agriculturalists everywhere must work together on key issues in order to advance the industry as a whole. I look forward to our future sessions in California, Chile, and Argentina!

DeLinda Hicklen #7

TALL XVI

Session 4 - Washington/New York

April 6-12, 2019

"National Government: Issues and Policies"

Saturday, April 6

Washington After Dark tour

My husband and I enjoyed a day on the Mall, taking in the National Museum of American History and walking to the Tidal Basin to see the beautiful cherry tree blossoms. That evening, my TALL XVI cohort convened for an enjoyable tour of the national monuments, marred only by the fact that my Texas Tech Red Raiders were playing in a Final Four game at the same time! I was awed once again by the majesty and beauty of the monuments to Lincoln and Jefferson, as well as the World War II monument and the Vietnam Memorial Wall. Even though I have visited several times in my life, they still remind me of how fortunate we are to live in this country and how many brave men and women sacrificed to maintain our freedom.

Sunday, April 7

Jeff Harrison, Combest, Sell & Associates

"Working with Congress and the New Farm Bill"

On Sunday morning, my husband and I visited Arlington National Cemetery. We watched the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and walked through the cemetery. Although I have been to Arlington many times, it is still very moving and a reminder of the sacrifices that have been made to keep our country free.

We went to Mr. Harrison's home for grilled steaks in the backyard and an array of speakers. Mr. Harrison invited renowned ag journalist Jim Weisemeyer to join us. I am familiar with his work and was thrilled to hear him speak to the group after dinner as he shared some of his experiences and some advice. Mr. Harrison spoke to us about his time lobbying for ag interests. He also invited Skylar Sowder, with Senator Boozman, and Cassie Bladow, with Senator Hoeven, to share some of their experiences working in Washington. Lindsey Ogden, with Combest, Sell & Associates, also spoke about her time in Washington - and was a fantastic co-host for the evening! We probably stayed long past our welcome, taking advantage of the chance to talk to some real insiders.

Monday, April 8

Jennifer Yezak, Deputy Clerk for the House Agriculture Committee

Ms. Yezak, a TALL II alumnae, welcomed us to the House Ag Committee hearing room. After we posed for pictures on the balcony overlooking the Capitol building, she made some comments about her work on the committee before the first set of speakers of the day. Later in the day, Dr. Jim was able to present Ms. Yezak with her award painting to recognize her as an Outstanding TALL Alumni.

Thomas Mills, Deputy Director for Agricultural Outreach, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Jess Kramer, Policy Counsel for the Office of Water, EPA

Mr. Mills and Ms. Kramer gave a synopsis of current ag-related focus issues at EPA, including WOTUS and Trump's mandate to simplify the definitions under WOTUS and many other areas of regulation. It was

encouraging to hear of EPA's professed willingness to repair their relationship with agriculture that was severely damaged during the last administration. Both speakers answered many questions from the TALL group, several having to do with nutrient trading. In response to a question about the dairy in Clovis whose water was contaminated by PFA's from the military base, Ms. Kramer gave us a basic explanation of what PFA's are and the implications of their presence.

Darren Bakst, The Heritage Foundation

"Heritage's Efforts to Reshape the Farm Bill Debate"

After briefly explaining what The Heritage Foundation is and how it is structured and operated, Mr. Bakst delved into the Foundation's stance against farm subsidies in general and in crop insurance premium subsidies. Given the audience, it's not surprising that many of my group disagreed with this stance and wanted to ask many more questions than we were given time for. He spoke about their support for Trump's attempt to simplify WOTUS and then about the Foundation's concern that the development of dietary guidelines is being influenced by environmental advocacy. While I agreed with their concerns up to this point, he then went off on a tangent relating to anti-meat sentiment and nut-based "milks". While the group asked questions to attempt to clarify some of his statements, we didn't get satisfactory or clear answers to many of the questions. My opinion after hearing this speaker is that The Heritage Foundation either has some harmful and potentially incorrect assumptions about the Farm Bill, crop insurance and nutrition issues or else did not send the person best qualified to argue their positions.

Patrick Kirwan, U.S. Department of Commerce Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee

"Sensitivity of Global Markets and How Policy Affects Trade in a World Economy"

As someone who is not too familiar with trade programs under the Department of Commerce, I appreciated hearing Mr. Kirwan's explanations of some of these programs and how they are used to promote exports. The audience had several questions, including some about the export credit agency, the pros and cons of Trump's bilateral trade agreement approach, and the trade deficit, which he answered expertly. A very informative session on a topic of vital importance to crop producers.

Keith Jones, Senior Professional Staff of the House Committee on Agriculture

Ag Committee Update

Mr. Jones has twelve years experience on the House Ag Committee and had sage advice in addition to his comments about working on the committee. His advice was to build and maintain relationships among the people you work with - because you never know where they will lead. As the party majorities shift back and forth, he has to work with different members, so it pays to have friends on both sides of the aisle. He noted that it is one of the most cordial and bipartisan committees in the House, so the Farm Bill process was fairly smooth, with the exception of the SNAP argument. In answer to a question of would SNAP ever be separated from the farm section, he replied that it would be a disaster for agriculture if it were because they would be no incentive or coalition to pass a Farm Bill separate from SNAP. He said that after passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, the current focus of the committee is oversight of the USDA's implementation of the bill.

Brooke Rollins, Assistant to the President for Strategic Initiatives, Office of American Innovation

Chris Chaffee, Associate Director of Public Liaison

Tim Pataki, Deputy Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Public Liaison

Jordan Bonfitto, National Economic Council

Kristi Boswell, Policy Advisor, Office of American Innovation

"Insight from the White House"

A rare opportunity to hear from high-level advisors to President Trump, particularly Ms. Rollins, a Texas native and a top graduate of Texas A&M. Her leadership of the Texas Public Policy Foundation garnered the attention of President Trump, who has tapped her for an advisory role in his administration. For me, the chance to get personal perspectives from inside the Trump administration was fascinating and informative. I think many of us realize that what we see in the media isn't the whole story and that Trump is almost demonized in some cases. So to hear a highly-respected person like Ms. Rollins speak about the accomplishments of the administration, and what it is really like to work with Mr. Trump, gave us some perspective on the media storm surrounding him. We may not have gone into the actual White House, but we were as close, literally and figuratively, as we could ever hope to be!

Congressman Mike Conaway, Texas 11th District

Representative Conaway has been a stalwart supporter of agriculture issues throughout his term in office. He is particularly proud of the 2018 Farm Bill he shepherded through the House, as Chairman of the House Ag Committee, with a record vote in favor. He also shared more personal stories and challenged us to lead with integrity and values. I am not a resident of his district, but I admire his leadership on agriculture issues that affect all of us.

James Glueck, Senior Policy Advisor to the Senate Ag Committee

It was interesting to compare Mr. Glueck's experiences working with the Senate Ag Committee versus the speakers from the House Ag Committee. As he pointed out, the Senators have to work together more than the Representatives because it is a much smaller body of members, so they team up more and squabble less than the large membership of the House. He also noted that the Senate Ag Committee staff works closely with the House Ag Committee staff, especially when developing the Farm Bills.

Tuesday, April 9

Visit to the USDA

Kathryn Hill, Public Affairs Specialist, Office of Communications

We met a legend in Mrs. Kathryn Hill! The things she has experienced in her lifetime would make for a great movie - I'm excited to read her upcoming memoir. Although her purpose on this day was to host our visit to the USDA, we were fortunate to also hear some of her stories and advice. She is a true original and an asset to the USDA and her community.

Dave Miller, Director of Reinsurance Division, Risk Management Agency (RMA)

"US Farm Bill and Crop Insurance"

As a crop insurance agent, I was particularly interested in hearing Mr. Miller's remarks. Although I am familiar with the workings of the RMA, he had good information for me about various insurance issues and noted that the US crop insurance program is used as a model worldwide.

Warren Preston, Deputy Chief Economist

"Agriculture Outlook"

Good information and statistics about the current state of agricultural economics in the US. The statistics aren't good! He also explained a little of how the NASS and WASDE reports are compiled and issued. These reports have an effect on crop markets, so it's good to know more about how they are created.

Clay Hamilton, Associate Administrator, Foreign Agricultural Services (FAS)

"FAS Overview"

Mr. Hamilton, a Texas native and former county extension agent, taught us about the composition and duties of the FAS, as well as giving synopses on major foreign trade partners such as Mexico, China and Japan. When asked what we should try to see in Chile and Argentina next year, he suggested we pay attention to Chile's food safety labeling program and try to learn how each country deals with US exports versus exports from other countries.

Matt Schertz, Staff Director, House Ag Committee

Bart Fischer, Deputy Staff Director/Chief Economist, House Ag Committee

Both men were involved in the writing of Titles I & II of the 2014 Farm Bill and many parts of the 2018 Farm Bill. Their close working relationship and friendship has undoubtedly helped them successfully work through the long process of writing and passing a Farm Bill through Congress. Two of the most interesting questions they answered were about the change in attitude when a party goes from minority to majority status, and how it makes their work harder, and what their priorities are for the next Farm Bill - to protect the risk management tools and more focus on agricultural research.

Dale Miller, Executive Director, American Farm Bureau Federation

John Newton, Chief Economist, American Farm Bureau Federation

"Issues Facing US Agriculture Domestically and Globally"

Mr. Moore told us about the composition of AFBF and outlined their goals and watch list items for 2019. Mr. Newton talked about the state of the farm economy - the fact that farm income levels are some of the lowest ever while debt to asset ratios are higher. Part of his job is monitoring the above and monitoring Farm Bill implementation status, the attempt to pass USMCA and the China trade dispute. Some of our questions led to further discussion of nutrient trading, African Swine Flu's effect on soybean exports and farm land valuation.

"Into the Woods" at Ford's Theatre

A visit to the historic Ford's Theatre for a touring Broadway musical. We were able to visit the theater's museum exhibits about Lincoln's presidency and assassination prior to the very enjoyable show.

Wednesday, April 10

Tour Day

Problems with our charter bus arrangements forced us to miss two of our tour stops in Maryland. We went straight to Broom's Bloom Dairy, where two other speakers joined us during a delicious lunch and ice cream.

William Amoss, Harford County Land Preservation Programs

Very interesting report from Mr. Amoss about Harford County, Maryland's agricultural land preservation program. This attempt to preserve farmland in the midst of residential and commercial development has been fairly successful using a combination of the county transfer-tax funded program and other state programs and at

this point has about 1/4 of the land in the county under conservation easement. They focus on protecting the land closest to areas of development and currently have a waiting list of owners wanting to get into the program. As we learned during our Sonora session with a conservation easement program in Texas, our landowners are more resistant to the idea, but may become more interested as land development increases around them.

John Stump, Regional Lending Manager for Maryland Farm Credit

Mr. Stump spoke briefly about the Farm Credit program in the area, which is smaller than in Texas, but equally vital to the agricultural producers in the area.

Broom's Bloom Dairy tour

We toured the dairy operation with two young ladies from the younger generation who are assuming leadership roles in the dairy operation, Ariel and Emmie. As they showed us through the 53-cow dairy, they also explained their efforts to diversify and use technology, including selling other products like beef and turkey at area farmers markets and installing machinery to make ice cream from their own milk. I was so impressed to see these knowledgeable and passionate young women invested in their family business and pushing for its growth!

Chris Riehl, Riehl Farm

The entire group had been looking forward to our visit to Riehl Farm and the Amish country. Chris Riehl, son of TALL's longtime hosts Sam and Susie Riehl, showed us their dairy and patiently answered our questions about what it's like to be Amish and how that affects the operation of their farm. Like many people, I had some misconceptions about Amish life, likely from watching too many sensationalized TV shows. I am so grateful to Chris for his willingness to talk to us and share his experiences! This visit to their immaculate farm and craft shop was all I hoped it would be and more.

Russell Redding, Secretary of Agriculture for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Mr. Redding joined our group at the Riehl farm to talk about the issues and programs in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. While there are some of the same issues as in Texas, most farms in the state are much smaller than in Texas and much more constricted by development all around them. In addition, they make efforts to work with the Amish farmers who may be prohibited from participating in state programs because of their self-imposed rules. It was an honor to meet Mr. Redding and generous of him to take the time to join us.

Thursday, April 11

New York City

Michael and Ben Mosner, Mosner Family Brands

We started the New York portion of the session with an early morning visit to Mosner Family Brands wholesale meat company in the Hunt's Point food market complex. Michael and Ben Mosner, father and son, gave us a tour of the meat processing facility and a brief history of the family company started in 1957. Originally they raised and slaughtered veal calves, but now process veal, lamb and pork. Availability of labor, consumer concern for food safety and animal welfare, and changing tastes in the meat market are among the issues they face as they operate this impressive third-generation family business.

Jered Walton, Baldor Specialty Foods

We were the first TALL group to visit Baldor Foods. This company distributes produce, meat and dairy products from facilities in NYC, Boston and Washington DC. The NYC facility is located in the Hunt's Point food market complex and distributes to the greater NYC area and beyond. Our host said they run more food delivery trucks in NYC than FedEx runs - 356 trucks per day just in NYC! We toured part of the food shipping warehouses and were able to hear from several company executives, including the company president. One of the company's current focus points is preventing food waste, which ties in with what USDA is promoting. According to one of their employees, 40% of the garbage by weight in landfills is food waste. They advocate for reduction in food waste and a goal of 100% use of food products. They buy produce from all over the US, including Texas, and import other products from all over the world.

Sultana Ocasio and Sheree Quiles, Community Kitchen of West Harlem

I am involved with a local food bank mobile pantry, so I was particularly interested in visiting the Harlem Community Kitchen program. Many aspects of their operation are similar, but the urban environment is very different from the situation in West Texas. For example, their clients come to them, while in Lubbock the food is sent out to the surrounding communities and participants. They have a food market space for clients to shop for supplemental food and also cook daily meals for senior citizens and the hungry. They also provide services such as assistance with SNAP applications, nutrition education and senior citizen outreach. I was very impressed with what they accomplish with limited space and limited budgets. Ms. Ocasio noted that their clients now tend to be working families whose wages aren't keeping pace with current costs of living. The lunch Chef Quiles prepared for us was one of the best meals we had all week and her description of preparing meals for several hundred people every day using whatever food was donated that day was a testament to her talent and commitment.

Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ)

Sean Kazmark, Francis Caponi, Jeffrey Brauner, Bethany Rooney & Patrick Thrasher

The Port Authority hosted us in their World Trade Center headquarters, where several employees outlined the size and scope of operations of one of the largest ports in the US - \$200 billion worth of goods pass through every year. PANYNJ encompasses shipping, rail, trucking, airport, bus and commuter train components. Six commissioners are appointed from each state to govern the port authority. We heard about many different aspects of the operation and how they screen for illegal cargo and security concerns. They said agricultural products are 10-16% of imports. This is a massive operation and it was fascinating to see how the different segments interact with each other and to hear the different reasons to choose one form of shipment over the others in different circumstances.

Kate Cox & Joe Fassler, The New Food Economy

Karen Karp & Christophe Hille, Karen Karp & Partners

The New Food Economy Discussion Panel

The New Food Economy is a non-profit web site that reports on food issues to about 250,000 readers per month. They are currently traveling to different places in the country to have discussions with producers and reporters, which is how they came to Dr. Jim's attention when they were recently in College Station. We had an interesting discussion of the sometimes contentious relationship between the media and agriculture. Ms. Cox and Mr. Fassler talked about their reporting during the "pink slime" incident between ABC and the meat packer BPI and then listened to our concerns about how ag producers are sometimes vilified in the media and how it

has made us reluctant to speak to the media. There are so many media sources on all platforms and it's difficult to determine which ones are aboveboard and which have an agenda, so even though we as producers know we need to share our stories with the public, we don't know who to trust for fair and balanced reporting. I was impressed that the New Food staff and their public relations team were willing to sit in the hot seat, so to speak, and really listen to our concerns and questions. I hope their workshops in different cities will allow for many such open discussions. I appreciate their stated commitment to be fair in their reporting and have signed up to receive their weekly bulletins.

Friday, April 12

Tour Day

Leonard & Greg DeBuck, DeBuck's Sod Farm

This father and son team gave us a tour of their sod farm near Pine Island, New York. We were able to see the sod cutter machine in operation and get a crash course in growing Kentucky bluegrass in this unique valley. The soils in this region are 60-80% organic matter! They have to drain water away from their crops, instead of irrigating like we do in Texas. Kentucky bluegrass does not spread like Bermuda-grass, so it has to be seeded for harvest at 12-14 months. After harvest, the land is rotated with soybeans before reseeding with grass. The automated sod cutter rolls up cuts of sod and stacks on pallets, making a pallet of rolled sod every two minutes, which is immediately loaded on a truck for delivery within 24 hours. Because the sod rolls need to be "fresh" on arrival, most of their sales are within 100 miles of their farm. They have some of the same concerns as farmers everywhere, like the rising cost of equipment and labor. We enjoyed meeting Greg's young daughter Audrey - hopefully among the next generation of sod farmers!

Paul Ruskiewicz, Ruskiewicz Onion Farm

While Paul was our host, his father also joined us for our farm visit and lunch. Paul is also a county legislator (similar to our county commissioners) and an alumni of the New York LEAD program that is comparable to TALL. We didn't tour the fields, as they are just now seeding the onions, but he showed us the onion storage barn and harvest machine. He talked about the challenges of growing onions for the large stores like Wal-Mart who have stringent onion-size parameters that reject the smaller onions, and the resulting problem of what to do with those rejected onions. He spoke about labor issues, including the New York state minimum wage laws and the potential that they will be forced to pay overtime. His father talked at the farm, and later during lunch, about the geological history of the valley and the onion-farms that have operated there for generations. I had the privilege of sitting near his father during lunch at the Jolly Onion restaurant and enjoyed his history lesson, pictures and Army stories.

John Kelder, Kelder's Farm

This historic family farm has branched out in several directions to remain in business. They have an active CSA farm, pick-your-own produce fields, a fresh market and an agri-tourism component with a seasonal corn maze, pumpkin cannon and playgrounds for field trips. John gave us a tractor-pulled wagon tour of the fields and told us about the place. Some of the group even tried out the trampoline and posed for pictures with their gnome-themed backdrops. A good example of a family farm that has adapted to their potential markets.

Jenny Crist Kohn, Crist Brothers Orchard

Our last tour stop was another excellent family owned business with multiple generations working together. Jenny Kohn, the daughter of one of the owners, rushed us to the apple-packing line before they closed for the day so we could see it in operation. Because apples are easily bruised, they are still harvested by hand and basically floated on water through the packing line, instead of being dumped in a pile (which would damage them). Like many farms today, they have installed advanced technology to size, grade, scan for defects and sanitize the apples as they travel down the line. We got a glimpse into the seedling storage rooms and some of the apple orchards. In addition to standard production of apples, this orchard works with researchers to experiment with different growing and grafting techniques and apple varieties. They were even so kind as to let us eat some of their delicious apples!

Closing Thoughts

The two "sections" of this session had different focuses, but many common issues. As you would expect, the Washington DC session was politically focused. We heard from different agencies, interest groups and political staff, but several themes crossed all sectors, particularly trade issues and the struggles agriculture faces with public perception.

The New York part of the session was a fascinating look at urban agriculture and how it differs from what I'm accustomed to at home in Texas. From the difference in food markets, to the logistical challenges of food delivery and international shipping, to the universality of fighting hunger and fighting consumer misconceptions around food products - all these topics were addressed and discussed. I have a new appreciation for the massive port operations and food markets in New York and the security required to safeguard those operations.

The tour days were another opportunity to see how agriculture is present in all areas of the country, in different size and scale, but with many of the same concerns about trade, labor and consumer perception. I was also reassured by the prevalence of family owned and operated farm operations we visited, belying the common assertion that corporate agriculture is taking over all the family farms. The places we visited also had in common multi-generational management and forward-thinking attempts to deal with technology tools and niche markets. The number of young people we saw engaged in these farms gives me hope that agriculture will continue in good hands for years to come.

Kassidy Martin

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Session 4 – Washington D.C., Maryland,
Pennsylvania and New York

“National Government: Issues and Policies”

The 4th Session for the TALL XVI class was a great mix of education of government, discussions on policies and issues that are being faced in agriculture today, and agriculture production that was a new sight to me. I found it interesting how there were several common themes no matter what group we were with and they included: Trade with China, Mexico, and Canada; Labor struggles; technology advancement; and the widening gap between rural and urban America.

Sunday April 7

Jeff Harrison and Jim Wiesemeyer

Mr. Harrison hosted us to a wonderful Welcome to DC dinner at his home. I enjoyed the walk to his house and seeing the housing in DC. Mr. Harrison had a special guest for us, Mr. Jim Wiesemeyer who is in agricultural communications within DC. Jim sends out a daily ag report and also has a podcast on ag reports and ag issues. Jim has interviewed multiple Presidents and Vice Presidents and had some great stories to tell. We talked about how to promote agriculture with the media in today's world.

Monday April 8

EPA Briefing

We started off our Monday with a visit from Thomas Mills and Jess Cramer from the EPA office. They talked to us about the three major things the EPA is working on right now. The first was deregulations. They have had 38 deregulatory actions to this point under the Trump Administration and have 39 more on plan. Their goal with these actions is to build a positive relationship with the agricultural sector. The second item is working with private sectors to develop a water action plan. This includes a plan for animal wastes and chemicals. We talked about the recent development with the groundwater contamination from Cannon Air Force Base putting a major financial strain on a local Clovis dairy farmer. This dairy farmer is currently having to dump his milk each day due to chemical contamination coming from the air force base via groundwater. Mr. Mills and Ms. Cramer did not know of this situation but they agreed there needed to be a new water action plan to prevent this from happening in the future. The other major item the EPA is working on is monitoring pesticide and chemical labeling, and making sure that the requirements are clearly stated. They are also making sure these requirements are coming from publicly available scientific sources.

Darren Bakst with The Heritage Foundation

The Heritage Foundation is a think tank based in Washington D.C. *“The mission of The Heritage Foundation is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.”* Mr. Bakst talked our group on how important research and education is to the Foundation. The conversations with Mr. Baskt got somewhat heated as he promoted his strong ideas of free enterprise, and his thoughts of eliminating aid especially in the crop insurance sector.

Patrick Kirwan with the U.S. Department of Commerce

Mr. Kirwan talked with our group on the purpose of the U.S Department of Commerce. The Department of Commerce works with businesses, universities, communities, and the Nation’s workers to promote job creation, economic growth, sustainable development, and improved standards of living for Americans. Mr. Kirwan has focused his work on improving the US competitiveness of Agency Trade Promotion Programs and developing key strategies. Mr. Kirwan is focusing his work on key areas such as China and India.

Keith Jones with the House Ag Committee

We had the opportunity to hear from Keith Jones within the House Ag Committee. We talked about how the House Ag Committee functions as bipartisan and they work well together to protect agriculture. He reminded us that nutrition programs are how the Farm Bill gets passed, but that caused issues this year. When it was proposed that work requirements be met to receive nutrition assistance, confrontation was met and it delayed the Farm Bill getting passed.

Brooke Rollins with the Trump Administration

Brooke Rollins and her team provided us with insight from the White House. The first thing we discussed was trade. The US is currently working on multiple trade deals, which include USMCA (United States, Mexico, and Canada Agreement), China, and Japan. Ms. Rollins said that they have to educate the new Congress members on the importance of open trade with Mexico and Canada, as they have not worked on it in the past like Senior members of Congress. We then talked about immigration, which we all know is a hot topic. She said that Trump realizes that immigration is needed to provide the needed workers in the labor force. Rollins said that putting in place a new immigration system and migrant worker program is on the Agenda for completion. The third item that Rollins discussed was regulatory reform. We were told that the Trump Administration has eliminated 29 regulations in the first year and 22 in the second year. This reform will help the workforce, higher education, criminal justice and occupational licensing. When we asked what she meant by the occupational licensing she gave us an example of a welder looking for a job, who had a criminal background. The person has served his time and learned welding as a trade. Currently he would have a hard time finding a job solely based on a criminal background, even though he has straightened up his life.

Tuesday April 9

Clay Hamilton with the USDA Foreign Agricultural Services

Mr. Hamilton talked about the Foreign Agricultural service that supports the US Farmers and Ranchers export their products. They do this by working with trade policy which recently has included Japan, Mexico, Canada, and China; they do export promotion at international trade shows; they provide market intelligence from international markets; and provide valuable information on their website for US producers. We talked about how important trade is for US agriculture and he reminded us that more than 20% of US Ag production is exported. I was surprised to know that the biggest ag export was walnuts at 81% being exported. We talked about how our trade situation has been disrupted with China, especially in 2018. Mr. Hamilton said that we lost \$15 billion dollars in exports that would have gone to China, which is huge when you consider that our total exports are \$141.5 billion. This was one more reminder that we have to come to a trade agreement with China.

David Miller with the USDA Reinsurance Services Division

Mr. Miller talked with our group on crop insurance. I really enjoyed this discussion since my job works closely with crop insurance. We learned how and why the government is involved in supporting and subsidizing the crop insurance program. I also learned that there is a compliance division to monitor the individual insurance agents and companies that issue insurance. Mr. Miller told us that when the program started in 1989 there were 100 million acres insured, and in 2017 this had grown to 335 million acres. The other facts that I enjoyed learning from Mr. Miller include: The top 3 crops in the US that are insured are corn, soybeans and wheat; and the top 3 Texas crops are cotton, corn, and pastureland/rangeland.

Warren Preston with USDA

We had the opportunity to talk with Mr. Preston who is with the USDA about the outlook of agriculture. He gave us the facts that there is \$427 billion in farm debt of which \$264 billion is real estate, and that equity in ag operations is dropping each year. He told us that 1 in 10,000 farms are going bankrupt, but that Texas is below the national average. We then talked about trade within agriculture. He told us that agriculture has \$141.45 billion in exports, which ends up giving US agriculture a trade surplus of \$13.5 billion. Mr. Preston ended by giving us the 2019 projections for ag: \$3.55 for corn with 92.8 million planted acres; \$0.70 for cotton with 13.8 million planted acres which is down from last year; \$5.15 for wheat with 4 million planted acres which is the lowest ever recorded; 27.4 billion pounds of beef; 24 billion pounds of pork; 219.7 billion pounds of milk; and a price of \$1.19 on steers.

Matt Schertz and Bart Fischer with the House Ag Committee

James Glueck with the U.S. Senate Ag Committee

Mr. Schertz and Mr. Fischer talked to our group about their roles in the House Ag Committee and their work in the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bill. We discussed the transition of them being in the majority and minority side in the House and how the views have shifted. They talked about how the House Ag committee functions bipartisan and that all parties truly want to take care of the American Producer. They all knew the importance of getting the Farm Bill passed in a quick manner and tried to put personal agendas to the side. James Glueck with the U.S. Senate Ag Committee also talked with our group. He echoed many of these same topics. Mr. Glueck also brought out the importance of workers on the Hill escaping away from DC and take breaks. He told us that it was easy to get sucked into the DC politics and way of life, but escaping for a few days seems to put your priorities back into prospective. I think we can all take this piece of advice and apply it to our own jobs and ourselves.

Dale Moore and Jon Newton with the American Farm Bureau Federation

Mr. Moore with the American Farm Bureau Federation introduced us to their agency and then talked to us about the items that they are promoting and working on with members of the Congress and Senate. These items included: trade agreements with Mexico, Canada, China and Japan; regulatory reform; rebuilding of infrastructure; sustainability; the opioid crisis in rural America; broadband internet in rural America; and immigration which is leading to a labor shortage. The American Farm Bureau Federation is promoting an ag worker visa program to help fill this labor shortage while immigration is being reformed. Mr. John Newton who is the chief economist for the American Farm Bureau Federation talked to us next. He talked to us about how 2019 is the year of unknowns especially with trade, prices, and acreage counts. We talked about the dairy industry and he told us that in 2018 seven percent of all dairies were abandoned. He also told us that 2 out of every 10,000 farmers and ranchers are filing for Chapter 12 bankruptcy. These are scary statistics, but in my job I see these things happening every day on a local basis. It is sad to see an industry that I love so much getting smaller each day.

Wednesday April 10

William Amoss with the Maryland Land Preservation Foundation

Mr. Amoss talked about the Land Preservation Foundation that is in effect for Maryland. Applicants must apply for this program and it is funded from the state government and real estate transfer fees. He said that there are currently over 600 applicants on the waiting list to be approved to the program. Once someone is approved for this program a conservation easement is put into place and the land must remain in agriculture use, even if the property is sold. The owners of the land tracts are allowed to build 2 homes, one being the primary home and one being a tenant home. All other structures must be for ag production such as a dairy barn, or equipment storage barn. The Foundation has preserved over 300,000 acres in 23

counties of Maryland, which is keeping Rural America alive in a state that the population is rapidly increasing.

Broom's Bloom Dairy

We had the opportunity to visit Broom's Bloom Dairy, which was established in 1756 and is being run by the 9th generation. The 9th generation happens to be all girls who have come back from college to run the farm and dairy. The Dallam's who own the dairy also have a farming operation to grow their feed and a country store with ice cream, fresh meat cuts, and a café. Ms. Dallam talked about how they needed to figure out additional income sources during the tough agriculture economy and the country store has been a great fit for their operation. The Dallam's have also found an additional revenue stream by allowing cell phone towers to be put on their place. I thought it was interesting how the Dallam's have found non-conventional ways to build additional revenue when the ag economy is tight.

Riehl Farms

This was probably my favorite stop, as it was the Amish Farm we were able to visit. The Riehl place is 36 acres and has a small dairy operation of 35 Holstein cows. The farm was established by Sam and Susie Riehl and is now operated by their son Chris. With Chris we talked about the rules of the Amish culture and how they have impacted their ag operation. He told us that since they cannot have electricity he has to pay roughly \$1,000 a month in gas bills to run the generators for the dairy. He told us that he understands this is not efficient or budget friendly, but he thinks it is important to stay true to his faith and culture. Chris also explained some practices within the Amish culture such as home living, work, what items they can and cannot have on their places, and how each area is different based on their Bishop. For example, the Amish are not supposed to have any type of equipment or vehicle that is not horse/mule drawn or with rubber tires. The Riehl's were approved by their Bishop to have a skid steer in their barn, but it had to stay within the dairy and barn areas, and not to be seen outside. Chris told us that another Bishop 3 miles down the road declined one his member's request for the same skid steer and for the same purpose. As we were driving around Amish Country we were able to see several horse drawn buggies, a horse drawn plow and a horse drawn spray rig.

Russell C. Redding - Secretary of Ag for Pennsylvania

Secretary of Ag Russell Redding took the time to talk to our group at the Riehl Farm. We did a brief discussion on agriculture in Pennsylvania and some of the issues Pennsylvania producers are fighting. Mr. Redding voiced his concern on the number of dairies that are shutting down recently based on milk prices. Pennsylvania is known for their lumber production, fertilizer production, food processing (they have 2,300 food processing facilities), meat, fish, and heavy poultry production. Mr. Redding also talked about the struggle of representing Amish producers and non-Amish producers and what is best for their operations on a generic ag platform.

Thursday April 11

Mosner Family Brands

We had the opportunity to visit Mosner Family Brands meat packing facility in the Hunt's Point Cooperative Market located in the Bronx. They provide custom meat orders while also providing wholesale meat to local grocery stores in New York City. The Mosner Family Brand Facility is being run by the 2nd and 3rd generation and very much a family business. We were able to talk with the Mosner's about the importance of providing a variety of meat items. The Mosner's have found a niche market by providing veal to the New York City area. The Mosner family is continuing to be innovative and adding new items as the need arises, most recently organic beef.

Baldor Specialty Food, Inc.

Baldor Specialty Foods is a food distribution business and warehouse. Like Mosner Family Brands they are located in Hunt's Point Cooperative Market located in the Bronx. We had the opportunity to tour the warehouse and see their system for packaging and delivery. We talked about some issues that they warehouse faces. The first of these items was the expense into labels. Since companies use different labels Baldor has to label all items with their own labels that will work with their technology. We also talked about the time that it takes to separate plastic, cardboard, and true trash. If they do not separate the cardboard and plastic for recycling they will be fined. The third issue we discussed was the difficulty of delivery in the city. Baldor Specialty Foods knows that they will have parking tickets on their trucks every day, but sometimes that is the only option to get the product delivered.

Community Kitchen in West Harlem

The Community Kitchen in West Harlem allowed us to tour their facility and have lunch at the kitchen. We were able to go see their food pantry where SNAP recipients can go shop for their items. When someone comes to get their items they tell how many people are in their house, and based on this they get a card that describes how many items in each category they can pick. I found it neat that they let people pick what items that want and know how to cook with. The Community Kitchen also serves over 50,000 free meals each month to senior citizens and citizens within the Harlem community. We talked with the kitchen staff about how the number of people who came for community meals and assistance drastically increased during the government shutdown. They told us that many of the residents within Harlem are government-contracted workers and were not receiving paychecks during this time. The Community Kitchen also helps people with their application process and continually needed documents for government assistance programs. We finished the day having a wonderful meal at the Community Kitchen so that we could see the food that was being served, and let me tell you...it was by no means the image we have in our mind of the big pot of soup that smells and looks weird. We were served a great turkey wing, amazing homemade macaroni and cheese, a great selection of steamed veggies, topped off

with a giant homemade cookie. The chef at the kitchen talked about how much she loved being able to teach people in the community how to cook good food, and giving people a trade such as cooking – which in turn allows them to find a good and steady job at restaurants in the City.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

Our group had the opportunity to visit with several members of the NY/NJ Port Authority at their office in the World Trade Center. Congress in both states established the Port in 1921 and in 1962 they opened the world's first container port. The Port provides 400,000 jobs with 229,000 of these being directly employed by the Port, and they move \$200 billion in goods each year. The Port Authority prides themselves on increasing cargo shipments while decreasing emissions and traffic on the roads. More than 90% of world trade comes in via container ships and nearly 85% of all products stay within 150 miles of the port. They have about 60,000 containers a week and have several ports that ships can come into, but most come into Port Newark. The Port is nearly 3,040 acres and has more than seventy tenants. We also learned that the Port Authority owns all the airports in New York City. The Port Authority also houses the Port Rail Authority. The Port moves the rail cars via a barge system and they work with all the railroads to coordinate operators and ocean carriers. We talked about how efficient the rail system is and we were told that one train car could hold 3 semi loads. This is another way that the Port is decreasing traffic on the roads.

We then talked about the Foreign Trade Zone, which was a product of The Foreign Trade Zone Act passed in 1934. There are nearly 300 trade zones in the US today. These zones promote economic and trade development by being duty free, reducing paperwork if the products stay in the zone, and these zones are at any customs port of entry. They told us that nearly 16% of all imports into the port and ran through the Foreign Trade Zone are agriculture products mainly including wine and packaged goods.

Friday April 12

DeBuck's Sod Farm

The DeBuck's have had a sod farm operation since 1979 and provide sod to areas within a 100-mile radius of their operation. We were able to see sod being harvested and the different plots, which had different types of grasses planted. Mr. DeBuck talked to our group on how they have increased their revenue by buying their own trucks and employing their own drivers for sod delivery. We talked with Mr. DeBuck about the high demand of his product since people are building more houses and wanting great landscaping. I have never seen a sod farm or sod being harvested, so it was a first and very interesting sight to see.

Ruszkiewicz Onion Farm

We had the opportunity to talk with Mr. Paul Ruszkiewicz about his produce operation, which includes onions, a variety of squashes, pumpkins, and Indian corn. He showed us his onion harvester which helps decrease the labor he needs for onion harvest. Mr. Ruszkiewicz said that operators in his area had double their rainfall last year and it made his crop that was harvested minimal and made for a tough financial year. He also talked to us about the amount of produce he has to throw away, because they do not meet the supplier's requirements of size and shape. He said that he could not take these to a cannery or anything so he ends up throwing a lot of his crop away. As I thought about this trip coming home, I wonder if he could financially justify setting up at a Farmer's Market or having a Market at their farm where people could buy these onions directly. This would allow for him to sell his product, decrease waste, and educate consumers.

Kelder's Farm

The Kelder farm is over 200 years old and started as a dairy farm. This farm has evolved to fresh produce including pumpkins, strawberries, raspberries, and other seasonal items. The Kelders' farm also includes a corn maze, petting zoo, on farm market, a section where you can go pick your own produce, and a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture). This CSA concept was interesting to me. It is basically a cooperative based system, where citizens can put money into the operation at the beginning of the year. If there is a crop made, the citizens are provided items based on the amount of investment that they put into the crop. The Kelders have found a way to diversify their operation by bringing more than crop production, but are also providing education to city folks on agriculture and where their food comes from.

Crist Orchards

At Crist Orchards I was able to see an apple orchard for the first time. We learned about the different types of apples and the demand for each type. We were able to watch the production line of the apples being bagged, which is slow moving due to the apples being delicate. We talked about how labor intensive the apple picking and bagging line is. Each apple has to be hand picked, and then each stem has to be trimmed, so that the long stems will not stab other apples and ruin them. I asked if there is any future outlook for robots to pick the apples. She said yes there was, but they would be expensive and the stem trimming would still have to be completed by hand. After leaving here I got to thinking about how far some commodities such as corn, cotton, and wheat have come with technology advances and the abilities to be able to afford them; while the fresh produce market is still very manual and time consuming.