

Michael J. Cochran (#7)

TALL XIX Narrative

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

April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025

### **Saturday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

After an interesting morning of storms in Texas, the majority of the cohort arrived in D.C. and many of us gathered for dinner, before an evening bus tour of D.C. We then boarded a bus with a very knowledgeable tour guide that had an encyclopedic memory of D.C. and global history. We stopped at the Jefferson Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, World War II Memorial, and Korean War Memorial to name a few. For early April we were fortunate to have beautiful weather.

### **Sunday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

The following morning was a free day to explore Washington, D.C. After attending an early church service, several of us visited the Holocaust Museum and the Museum of the Bible, each offering powerful and meaningful experiences in their own unique ways. I then spent time at Arlington National Cemetery visiting my grandparents' graves, reflecting in a place made even more beautiful by the vibrant pink cherry blossoms still in bloom following the recent Cherry Blossom Festival. The cemetery, surrounded by blooming trees and flowers, was a serene and fitting tribute to so many who served our country. That evening, I had the opportunity to reconnect with two cousins who live in the area, and we enjoyed a wonderful dinner filled with great conversation.

### **Monday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

The following morning, we met Mrs. Jennifer Yezak with Texas A&M AgriLife in the office of Foreign Relations. She was exceptionally helpful over the next several days guiding us around D.C. and coordinating speakers. Our first trip on this rainy morning was to The USDA including to visit with Jen Teller, Ricky Schreuder, and Andrew Fisher. Discussions covered the Secretary's 50-day tenure, ongoing transitions, the importance of deregulation, market access, and rural prosperity. The Economic Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) has distributed \$5 billion of its \$10 billion allocation, addressing major agricultural losses, though staffing challenges at APHIS and RMA remain a concern. Discussions highlighted regional drought issues, the impact of solar farms on farmland, and the need for stronger support for young farmers, particularly around crop insurance and loan programs. Individuals from TALL praised the ECAP program's simplicity and effectiveness but also stressed the need for improved communication between the national office and local USDA offices.

Following lunch at the Capitol cafeteria, we had the opportunity to visit with Representative G.T. Thompson who is on the House Agricultural Committee. He emphasized the urgent need for a new farm bill to address agricultural volatility, expand market access, and strengthen trade opportunities. Key priorities included doubling the Market Access Program, boosting Title I funding

by \$50 billion, and allocating \$2.5 billion to land grant universities, alongside \$2 billion for animal health research. Budget reconciliation challenges, workforce shortages, and the impact of trade tariffs were highlighted, with bipartisan support critical to success. Discussions also stressed extending young farmer benefits, ensuring access to Commodity Credit Corporation funding for potential aid, and improving crop insurance options, especially for specialty crops. Representative Thompson encouraged us to maintain active feedback to ensure future policies meet the evolving needs of agriculture. Two of Representative Thompson's staff members, both fellow Texans (one an Aggie and the other a Red Raider) led us on a guided tour of the Capitol. After navigating a series of staircases and tunnels, we received an excellent tour, with the staff highlighting notable rooms, statues, paintings, and other significant features throughout the building.

Next we met with Cam Madsen, the legislative director for Congressman Mike McCaul's office. He outlined priorities including passing the Farm Bill, strengthening cybersecurity through better public-private information sharing, regulating AI exports to China, and enhancing export controls. He stressed the need for bipartisan support to pass the Farm Bill before its September 30 expiration and warned about threats to U.S. manufacturing, NATO defense spending, and Greenland's strategic importance. Cam highlighted the potential of blockchain and stablecoins to modernize international payments and emphasized maintaining the U.S. dollar's global leadership, while mentioning the need for stronger protections around critical infrastructure and university research.

Representative Pfluger was delayed because of a meeting with the Speaker of the House on Reconciliation, but he came and covered a variety of topics. With his district, he touched on agricultural and policy priorities, including the urgent need for a new Farm Bill, concerns over OSHA's proposed heat rule for agricultural workers, and the importance of addressing USDA and APHIS staffing shortages. Dr. Shea outlined legislative efforts to reduce the \$36–\$37 trillion national debt through reconciliation, extend 2017 tax provisions, and stabilize markets impacted by tariffs. Energy policy reforms were discussed, with a focus on supporting reliable sources like natural gas and nuclear while repealing subsidies for solar projects due to local environmental concerns. The session closed with encouragement for continued advocacy, community leadership, and deeper engagement in public service to support agriculture, energy, and fiscal health.

That evening, we traveled to Georgetown for an excellent dinner with Mr. Adam Krzywosądzki and Mr. Bartosz Folusiak from the Polish Embassy. I had the privilege of sitting with Mr. Krzywosądzki, which made for an excellent discussion. They discussed Poland's growth since the fall of communism in 1989. Now the fifth largest country in the EU, Poland has built a nearly \$1 trillion economy and become a key U.S. trading partner, hosting over 1,600 American companies. Security and defense remain top priorities, with Poland ranking second only to the U.S. in NATO defense spending and firmly resisting Russian influence. With 2.5% growth projected in 2024, strong U.S. energy partnerships, and the EU's lowest unemployment rate at 2.7%, Poland continues to strengthen its position. Although cautiously optimistic about U.S. leadership, concerns about tariffs remain, and with a presidential election approaching, military experience is a major focus.

**Tuesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

The following sunny morning we took the subway to the Capital Hill Club for breakfast. There Mrs. Yezak provided background on her time at Texas A&M, TALL, and working in D.C. Following her Mr. Matt Schertz spent a good amount of time with the cohort, discussing the challenges and complexities of passing farm bills in Congress, reflecting on lessons from the 2014 and 2018 bills and looking ahead to the 2023 Farm Bill. The 2014 Farm Bill introduced major reforms like ending direct payments and creating ARC and PLC programs under tight budget constraints, while the 2018 Farm Bill, passed on time, carried a 10-year cost of \$850 billion. The upcoming 2023 Farm Bill faces similar fiscal pressures, including House and Senate demands for significant SNAP cuts and the broader challenges of navigating the budget reconciliation process. He emphasized the historical importance of bipartisan cooperation, the need for new funding to strengthen the agricultural safety net, and the difficulty of balancing urban and rural priorities.

After breakfast, we returned to the USDA for a meeting with Secretary Brooke Rollins. As a fellow Texan, she took a genuine interest in learning where each of us was from, our professional backgrounds, and our ties to agriculture. In person, Secretary Rollins was even more impressive than her media presence suggests, and is exceptionally engaging, personable, and very sharp. As the first woman and the first Texan to serve in this role, she represents Texas and the agricultural community well, and we are fortunate to have one of our own guiding us forward.

The afternoon was spent at the Bush School's D.C. campus with a lineup of speakers with various backgrounds and involvement there at our nation's capital. Mr. Ted McKinney shared his background in agriculture, including his work with Corteva and the Trump administration, and highlighted NASDA's 109-year role representing agricultural leaders across all 50 states and four territories. He discussed the strategic use of tariffs, the need for careful trade negotiations, and the challenges facing industries like cotton. McKinney emphasized the importance of expanding agricultural research funding in the next Farm Bill, maintaining strong food safety standards, and developing new markets. He also addressed the risks of avian influenza and the importance of vaccination programs, while encouraging future leaders to stay adaptable, lead with integrity, and continue advocating for agriculture's future.

Next Ms. Nowak Armstrong, with the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, shared her deep background in agriculture through her family's involvement and her career on Capitol Hill and with Farmer Co-ops. She discussed key challenges facing co-ops, including the impact of trade tariffs on costs, the pending expiration of the Section 199A tax provision critical to farmer-owners, and ongoing labor and immigration issues affecting the agricultural workforce. She also highlighted the complexities of sourcing domestic products for school meals and navigating SNAP program reforms.

Then Mr. Chandler Gould, with the National Association of Wheat Growers, outlined the challenges facing the 2023–2025 Farm Bill, emphasizing the risks of rising tariffs, growing U.S. dependency on China, and projected losses in U.S. soybean acres to Brazil. He stressed the need for a comprehensive five-year Farm Bill to provide farmers with strong risk management tools and

warned against breaking it apart during reconciliation. Mr. Gould also highlighted the potential of hybrid wheat and the critical importance of public research to agriculture's future.

Dr. Kateryna Shynkaruk, a lecturer at the Bush School, discussed the origins and ongoing implications of the Ukraine War, emphasizing that unresolved security gaps following the Cold War enabled Russia's aggression. She highlighted key moments such as Ukraine's nuclear disarmament under the Budapest Memorandum, Russia's invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014, and President Putin's broader goal to weaken Western unity and assert Russia as a global rule-maker. Dr. Shynkaruk stressed that there is currently no appetite for a ceasefire from Russia, and tactics of civilian intimidation continue. She emphasized the urgent need for credible deterrence measures, such as NATO membership or parallel security guarantees, to prevent further Russian aggression and maintain European stability.

The final speaker of the day was Mr. Vernie Hubert with Cornerstone Government Affairs. Mr. Hubert, originally from South Texas, shared his career journey from a legal internship on the House Agriculture Committee in 1985 to his eventually joining the government relations firm Cornerstone, which grew significantly. Representing clients such as the American Sheep Industry and US Rice Producers, he discussed the persistent challenges in passing farm bills, the crucial role of leadership in agricultural policy, and the complexities of budgeting, reconciliation, and SNAP funding in Congress. Mr. Hubert emphasized the need for bipartisan engagement, strong grassroots advocacy, and ongoing education to navigate the increasingly difficult legislative environment for agriculture.

### **Wednesday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

The following morning, we boarded a bus early to beat the D.C. traffic and make our way north to Maryland. After what seemed like a short drive we were in beautiful countryside with rolling hills and lush green pastures. As one colleague in the cohort put it, "I have never seen this shade of green in Texas". Our first stop was at a feed store called The Mill. The owner, Mr. Holloway, and several others gave us a tour and spent a good deal of time answering questions. They highlighted how Maryland farmers are adapting to strict environmental regulations by using advanced technology, including drones for nutrient management and crop applications. State incentives support cover crops, though farmers still absorb much of the cost, and nutrient applications are restricted after November 15. Land preservation programs offering \$7,000–\$8,000 per acre help protect farmland amid rising solar development pressures, balancing economic and environmental goals.

After a slight detour we made our way to My Lady's Manor Farm. The Smith family was very generous with their time, resulting in a great conversation. This focused on the challenges faced by a large dairy farm in Harford County, Maryland, navigating strict environmental regulations due to its CAFO status. Located 21 miles north of Baltimore, the farm must comply with nutrient management plans, water permits, and expanded manure storage requirements, now requiring six months of capacity. Despite land preservation efforts since 1993, the farm continues to manage pressures from urban development, regulatory compliance, and rising infrastructure needs,

including building a new manure pit and upgrading facilities. With only 15–17 dairy farms remaining from 700 in the 1950s, the farm also advances its operations through genetic improvements, embryo transfer, and adaptation to new technologies to remain competitive and sustainable.

Ms. Jen Wilson, with the Maryland Land Preservation, then gave a brief presentation on her work. Land preservation efforts, which began in 1968 and now face funding threats from political shifts, state budget pressures, and solar development. As Maryland aims to preserve 30% of its land by 2030, balancing traditional agriculture, agritourism, and energy demands has become increasingly complex.

Our last stop in Maryland was at Broom's Bloom Dairy where we had a wonderful lunch of sandwiches, crab chowder, and some of the best ice cream I've ever eaten. Following lunch, we were given a tour of the farm and dairy. The farm began in 1990 and has expanded into cheese and ice cream production, selling through their farm store and local markets while employing up to 40 people in the summer. Now a second-generation family business, they face challenges from Maryland's strict regulations compared to neighboring states, but continue to prioritize quality products, direct customer relationships, and adapting to market demands.

The final visit of the day was a short drive into Pennsylvania's Lancaster County, where the Amish community continues to farm the region's rich, fertile land, creating a truly picturesque countryside. We visited Mr. and Mrs. Riehl's farm for a discussion with them and several individuals from TALL's Pennsylvania counterpart, RULE. Mr. Riehl shared how his family's 60-acre operation reflects the Amish commitment to traditional farming practices, Christian values, and cultural preservation. He discussed the community's gradual shift toward organic farming, the adoption of risk management tools, and efforts to adapt to regulatory changes while maintaining minimal reliance on modern technology. The conversation also explored challenges related to land transfer, agricultural innovation, and the ongoing balance between preserving tradition and embracing necessary modernization. Following this stop, we boarded the bus and traveled further north, arriving in New York City late that night.

#### **Thursday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

On our first morning in New York, we traveled to Hunts Point to visit and tour Mosner Family Brands. Mr. Seth Mosner shared the 70-year history of Mosner Family Brands, which grew from a Bronx butcher shop into a national protein distributor and manufacturer. After expanding into veal, lamb, and organic grass-fed products, the company shifted fully to manufacturing in 2020 and officially acquired Great American Foods in 2022. Today, Mosner operates multiple facilities, focuses on private label production, supplies to major retailers, and imports much of its grass-fed organic protein. Mr. Mosner has a brilliant business mind, and it will be exciting to follow this family business going forward.

The next stop was at Baldor Specialty Foods. Mr. Jared Walton spent several hours with us, during which he provided a tour and answered questions over lunch. He touched on how they distribute

to numerous restaurants in the area, wholesales products from Europe, Israel, and South America, and manages \$9 billion in annual trade with 500 trucks covering Maine to Virginia. Employing 3,500 people, the company has expanded into dairy, fish, and specialty foods, while planning to extend operations to Miami. He provided an easy statistic regarding supply and demand: 2/3 of food consumed in U.S. is consumed east of Mississippi and 2/3 grown west of the Mississippi. Key challenges for them include tariffs on produce, migrant labor shortages, and tight school produce budgets. Future plans focus on facility expansion, strengthening food safety, and growing relationships.

Our last stop for the day was across the river to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's temporary office in New Jersey. Here speakers from different departments touched on the vast network of critical infrastructure, including seaports, airports, tunnels, bridges, and an interstate rail system, supporting significant commerce across the region. In 2024, the port handled 8.7 million TEUs, down from 9.5 million in 2019, and operated five major container terminals, with private operators such as CMA CGM playing key roles. Its rail subsidiary, New York-New Jersey Rail LLC, moves about 7,000 car loads annually, offsetting roughly half a million truck moves. The Authority's Foreign Trade Zone 49 saw a 49% increase in jobs and \$17.2 billion in shipments in 2024, highlighting its growing economic impact. Strategic initiatives focus on expanding infrastructure to meet a projected 17 million TEU volume by 2050, enhancing port efficiency, growing the Express Rail Network, and promoting sustainable operations.

The last speaker of the day was Mr. Sal Gilberte. Mr. Gilberte is the founder of a firm specializing in the creation of commodity-based exchange-traded products (ETPs) with a focus on agriculture and energy. He has had a fascinating career in securities trading, much of which has focused on commodities. Through this time, he has seen the evolution of various securities and the industry, including the futures markets, and was the one that created the standard contract for ethanol. In addition, his firm is also developing other products as it relates to various crypto currencies.

### **Friday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

The last day of the session began with an early bus ride out of Time Square into the beautiful country north of New York City. Our first stop was at Minkus Farms where Mr. Rick Minkus provided a tour of his operation. Minkus Farms ships 4,000 truckloads of onions annually, selling at about \$12 per 50-pound bag, and farms on muck soil known for its high-water retention. Strict New York regulations, often exceeding USDA standards, have sharply increased costs, such as a rainwater project classified as commercial instead of agricultural, and \$1 million is spent yearly on herbicides for 400 acres. Mr. Minkus highlights growing concerns about regulatory burdens on farmers in a region serving a quarter of the U.S. population between Boston and Washington, D.C.

We then traveled to the family-owned Stap's Dairy. There Garrett Stap shared how they began bottling their own milk in 2016 after losing access to a local processor, forming a co-op with six other dairies. They process small, non-homogenized batches with an 18-day shelf life, milking 120–140 cows daily and ranking as the third-largest milk source in the county. During COVID-19, Stap Dairy expanded operations to meet local demand and partnered with Nourish New York,

supplying 300–400 gallons of fresh milk weekly to 12–15 food pantries. They also work with Anheuser-Busch, using brewers' grain for feed, and continue supporting the local food movement.

The next stop was Crist Bors Orchards, where the owners provided an impressive tour of their 650-acre wholesale operation. Supplying premium grocery markets such as Walmart, BJ's, and H-E-B, the orchard ships approximately 650 tractor-trailer loads annually and is one of Walmart's largest partners on the East Coast. Using nitrogen technology developed through Cornell research, they can maintain apples in dormancy for up to 12 months by precisely controlling nitrogen and oxygen levels. The farm also utilizes dwarf rootstock to keep trees smaller and reduce labor needs by nearly 75%. Harvest takes place from August through Thanksgiving, with packing rates reaching a tractor-trailer load per hour. Their advanced quality control system captures 120 images per apple across multiple wavelengths, including X-ray, to ensure 86% of the fruit meets premium grading standards. Despite ongoing union-related legal challenges, Crist Bors Orchards continues to operate efficiently while maintaining a strong focus on product quality.

After lunch we made a quick stop at Halal Pastures. They are a certified organic operation focused on providing wholesome, organic meat and produce for their family and community. Founded by a husband-and-wife team (she an attorney and he in finance) the farm grows a variety of crops not commonly available in stores and uses high tunnels to extend the growing season, with plans to expand to 60 tunnels. They also pump water directly from a nearby creek, supporting sustainable and early-season production.

The final stop of the session was West Point, where we were privileged to receive a tour from Retired Colonel Glenn Goldman. The visit offered an inspiring look at one of the nation's most historic and prestigious military academies. We explored the scenic grounds overlooking the Hudson River, admired the iconic architecture, and learned about West Point's enduring traditions of leadership, honor, and service. Highlights included visits to the Cadet Chapel, Trophy Point, and a discussion of General Kosciuszko's strategic contributions during the Revolutionary War. The experience provided a deeper appreciation for the Academy's role in shaping future leaders and was a fitting and memorable way to conclude the session.

Each session has been unique and memorable in its own way, and I often find myself wondering how the next could possibly surpass the last. While each experience is different, they never disappoint. Visiting Washington, D.C. during such a historic and dynamic time made for an unforgettable week. Having never traveled beyond the major East Coast cities like New York and D.C., it was eye-opening to explore the region's agricultural communities and gain a deeper understanding of local production practices. Without the TALL program, opportunities to experience this part of the country and connect with producers firsthand would not have been possible.

TALL Cohort XIX Session Four Narrative  
Washington, DC, Maryland, Pennsylvania, & New York  
Liz Cowan Phillips, 19  
April 5-12, 2025  
**National Government: Issues and Policies**

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This trip marked a lot of firsts for me. It was my first time in DC, but it was also my first time changing airlines and AIRPORTS to get to my destination. Though I eventually made it to DC on Saturday, April 5th, it was not easy and meant that I missed the night tour of the National Monuments I was so looking forward to. Mike Atkinson and I originally booked the same American flight out of McAllen International but after I got bumped off our flight due to weather in DFW, I made the call to race back to Harlingen to catch an United flight that would put me through Houston instead. Turns out I made the right call because Mike spent the night in the DFW airport before arriving in DC on Sunday.

**Sunday, April 6, 2025**

***National Cathedral***

Scotta Faulkenberry and I made plans to attend services at the National Cathedral so we met up in the lobby of the Holiday Inn - Capital and used the metro cards Dr. Jim and Jennifer secured for us to take the metro and then a city bus to the National Cathedral where we arrived early enough to take in the gorgeous space before the second service of the day. I am currently in the process of being received into the Episcopal church, so it was really special for me to attend a service at the National Cathedral which is part of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington.

***Smithsonian National Zoo***

After the service, Scotta and I hopped in an Uber to the Smithsonian National Zoo to see the Bao Li and Qing Bao, giant pandas who debuted at the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute in Washington, D.C. on January 24th of this year. The pandas come to the United States as part of a 10-year agreement with China, who owns every panda in the world. The Smithsonian Zoo pays \$1 million a year to the China Wildlife Conservation Association to keep the pandas.

***Holocaust Museum***

After a great Italian lunch, Scott and I headed our separate ways to take in different museums. I had reserved tickets to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum a few weeks before the trip. The Holocaust Museum was incredibly busy with many school tours, so it was a bit packed but after we were allowed into the exhibit, the crowd started to thin. Every exhibit was carefully crafted and honored the six million Jewish lives taken. One that stood out particularly was an actual train



car used to transport over 100 people to concentration camps. Walking into it, it was impossible to imagine 100 souls crammed in to such a tiny space, headed for death or torture. A quote that will stay with me forever is from Holocaust survivor, Abel Herzberg, "There were not six million Jews murdered; there was one murder, six million times."

After the Museum, I met up with some of our cohort at the VUE Rooftop DC which offers amazing views of the White House and National Monument (and obscenely priced cocktails, \$38 for an espresso martini), we then had a great sushi dinner at The Hamilton followed by drinks at the Round Robin Bar.

## **Monday, April 7, 2025**

The first official day as TALL XIX in DC (for many of us with delayed travel) started bright and early on Monday when we met our DC Coordinator, Jennifer Yezak in the lobby of the Holiday Inn-Capital. Jennifer is the Associate Vice Chancellor for Federal Relations for the Texas A&M University System and was critical in getting us appointments and access to folks on the Hill. Jennifer lead us through the metro system to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for our first visit.

### ***USDA***

#### ***Jenn Hiller, Food and Nutrition Chief of Staff***

Jenn introduced us to the work going on at USDA in it's 4th month of Trump's second administration, equating it to drinking from a firehouse. She stressed the critical role President Trump is taking as the executive branch is working to get things done rather than rely on the congressional slog we've seen in the past. Jenn spoke about the work Secretary Rollins is doing to connect farmers to market access and highlighted the six trips the secretary will go on as trade missions.

#### ***Ricki Schroeder, Chief of Staff, Research, Education, and Economics***

Ricki and his team lead work such as the County crop yield estimate report and July Cattle reports that were discontinued under the Biden Administration but have since been brought back under Trump's second term. His work also involves agricultural research service where 95 locations work on critical issues (currently avian influenza).

#### ***Andrew Fisher, Chief of Staff Farm Protection and Conservation***

Fisher works for the Farm Production and Conservation department at USDA which oversees Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and the FPAC Business Center. I related most to his work as the Federal Crop Insurance Program is governed by RMA. I was grateful to Andrew for listening to my questions/concerns about what I am seeing on the ground as an agent and was pleasantly surprised that both he and Jenn took my concern seriously and asked to follow up with me personally.

### ***Capital Hill***

After a great morning with USDA, we hit the metro again, this time headed to Capital Hill where we at lunch in the Longworth building's cafeteria.

### ***GT Thompson, U.S. Representative from Pennsylvania, Republican Leader of the House Agriculture Committee***

One of the first points Representative Thompson made was to touch on the critical nature of passing a farm bill sooner rather than later. He was critical of the Biden administration for taking two years to make decisions on key agricultural leaders, essentially kicking the can down the road. In addition to the Farm Bill, the Ag Committee is focused on tariffs, budget reconciliation, and sealing the border. He spoke to us about an ag workforce group that has written a bill that would provide a pathway to work for immigrant labor that would be "tri-partisan" in nature, benefitting Democrats, Republicans, and we, the people of the United States. Rep. Thompson wrapped our time by sharing that his fear would be reconciliation holding up a farm bill that so many Americans need passed.

### ***Capital Tour***

After meeting with Representative Thompson, our cohort was treated to an exclusive tour led by John, one of the interns in the House Agriculture Committee's Offices. It was really neat to be able to walk through the tunnels from the Longworth building to the Capital building and then to learn about all of the statues from all 50 states. Each state is able to commission and display two statues of famous and influential citizens their choosing. After a great tour by John, we headed back to the Longworth building for photos overlooking the Capital. While waiting for our speakers, we had a little incident with Capital police after McCrae and Kody pressed a panic button under the desk in the meeting room.

### ***Cam Mattenson, Congressman Micheal McCaul's Office***

Cam spoke to us on behalf of Congressman McCaul about the importance of foreign affairs and cyber security. He spoke a briefly on the Signal Chat controversy involving Jeffery Goldberg. One of the things that stuck with me was how underprepared the United States seems to be when it comes to building aircraft carriers. Cam said that should the U.S. need to build it's own aircraft carrier on our own soil, we would have a 10 year turn around time.

### ***August Pfluger, U.S. Congressman Representing the 11th District of Texas***

Congressman Pfluger represents the Brownwood area of Texas and is from San Angelo. Pfluger also raised concerns about the Reconciliation Bill passing. He touched on the Death Tax exemption that will expire at the end of 2025. He is working on making this and other taxation provisions permanent. Pfluger lists the following priorities: national debt, fiscal health of the United States, trade, and the Farm Bill.

***Embassy of the Republic of Poland***

***Mr. Adam Krzywosadzki, Deputy Head of Mission***

***Mr. Bartosz Folusiak, First Counsel, Head of Section***

Following a day on the Hill, the cohort loaded up in Ubers and headed to Brasserie Liberte for a lovely dinner with representatives from the Embassy of the Republic of Poland. Poland has been a great ally to the United States and there are approximately 1,600 U.S. companies operating in Poland at the moments such as Google, Lockheed Martin, and other tech companies. Poland is invested in its relationship with the United States as their top priority is security and defense. Current Polish President Andrzej Sebastian Duda is adamant that Poland will not become part of Russia again which is a real threat. Poland is experiencing phenomenal economic growth, focusing on nuclear power, and building its defenses.

**Tuesday, April 8th, 2025**

***Capital Hill Club***

***Matt Schertz, Schertz Strategies LLC, Principal***

Matt Schertz is a Texas Tech grad from Robstown, TX who's 20 year career in DC started with an congressional internship and led to the Chief of Staff for the House Agricultural Committee and now, Principal of his own lobbying firm that works for companies such as Anheuser-Busch. Matt shared many of his experiences working on previous Farm Bills and notes that the current Farm Bill is the most controversial yet due mostly to the misalignment of urban and rural interests. One of my biggest takeaways from our time with Matt was an image he brought to life regarding how Democrats and Republicans in DC work together. He said that D's and R's used to identify along a standard bell curve, with the majority of representatives falling closer to the middle, more alike than they are different. Now, D's and R's operate outside of the curve, further away from the center and less willing to work together than ever. Matt also mentioned that unlike other bills that pass through legislation, the Farm Bill is one of the few that follows the processes our founders established.

***United States Department of Agriculture***

***Brooke Rollins***

After a great breakfast at the Capital Hill Club, which is also the national social club for Republicans, we took the Metro back to USDA where we went through a bit more security than the previous day, perhaps because Secretary Rollins was present. We waited in the foyer of the Secretary's offices for a bit before meeting her and her larger than life Texas personality. Rollins was kind enough to take a few minutes to meet each and every one of our cohort members and I was thrilled that she took the time to talk with me about the 1944 Water Treaty crisis after hearing that I was from the Rio Grande Valley. It was special to hear that she knows and cares about the perils our producers are facing along the Texas-Mexico border. We also learned that she goes to church with Michael Cochran, another one of our cohort members. Meeting Rollins was an honor

and she left a lasting impression on me. One that puts America and its farmers first and cares about taking action.

### **Texas A&M University's Bush School of Government & Public Service- DC**

As an Aggie, it was a proud moment to visit the Bush School in DC, which I am embarrassed to admit I didn't even know existed prior to this trip. We were greeted by Jared Pic, Assistant Director of Recruitment. The Bush School DC offers 2 graduate programs (Master in International Policy and a Master in National Security and Intelligence) and has grown from 12 to 112 students.

### ***Ted McKinney, CEO, NASDA and former USDA Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs***

Ted McKinney grew up on a farm in Indiana and was the Director of Agriculture for Mike Pence and is now the CEO of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA). NASDA serves to fill the gap between the farm and policy, advocating for the needs of the farmer and rancher of America. Ted stated that this Trump presidency will be one of the most consequential in recent history. He talked about tariffs, saying that there are three kinds: 1) Transactional 2) Permanent and 3) Reciprocal. In regards to the current tariffs under Trump, many are thinking these will be long term or permanent but what would be best for the US economy would be transactional. Ted is currently working with commodity groups to make improvements to Title 1, insurance expansion, reference prices and labor reform.

### ***Mary Nowak Armstrong, Director, Government Affairs, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives***

Mary is another Texas native from Caldwell, TX who represents farmers cooperatives, 1/3 of her members being dairies. She spoke about how co-ops are sensitive to loss of trade markets due to tariffs, how labor is one of the most concerning costs for farmers, and how labeling and the MAHA movement are impacting products such as cranberry juice which requires sugar to be palatable.

### ***Chandler Goule, CEO, National Association of Wheat Growers***

Chandler is an Aggie from Stephenville who represents Wheat Growers. From his viewpoint, tariffs will have a catastrophic impact on the ag industry that will take decades to recover from. He doesn't indicate much faith in the Farm Bill passing within 2025.

### ***Dr. Kateryna Shynkaruk, Senior Lecturer, Bush School DC***

Dr. Shynkaruk is a Ukrainian lecturer at the Bush School DC who started our conversation about the war between Russia and Ukraine by grounding us in the reason it started in the first place. From her perspective, the war started because Putin wanted to and could. Putin did this because he views Russia as modeled after the Western world.

### ***Vernie Hubert, Principal, Cornerstone Government Affairs***

Vernie is from Rivera, TX which is just on the other side of the King Ranch from the RGV, so our neighbor to the North. He has been in DC since 1984 and now works at Cornerstone Government Affairs which is a government relations firm. One of the neat things about cornerstone is that when a client comes to the firm with a problem, a core team is assembled to analyze the issue from all angles

before presenting a solution or direction. Vernie doesn't see enough interest or emphasis on the Farm Bill for it to get through in 2025.

### **Wednesday, April 9th, 2025**

We hopped on a bus bright and early to leave DC and make our way through Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey with agricultural stops along the way.

#### **The Mill at Black Horse, Whitehall, Maryland**

***Henry Holloway, Owner***

***Ben Hushon***

***Mark Holloway***

The Mill at Black Horse is an agricultural supply operation that provides a variety of services from fencing to fertilizer. Henry Holloway, owner of The Mill, shared a lot of information about the area's farmers and their operations. The average field size in the surrounding area is 10 acres which create many challenges such as pesticide and fertilizer application and increased driving time. The Mill has helped farmers with this issue by hiring a drone pilot who custom applies chemicals with a drone as opposed to using a costly and often unavailable helicopter. Most of the area farmers grow corn, wheat, and soybeans.

#### **My Lady's Manor Farm, Monkton, Maryland**

***Sam, Robert, Justin, and Jarod Smith***

The Smith family operates a 6th generation farm which has been put into a permanent conservation easement, protecting it from urban or housing development for perpetuity. They grow corn, soybeans, and alfalfa, mostly to feed their 400 head of purebred Holsteins that are milked twice a day. The Smiths spoke a lot about the government regulation they face on a daily basis such as water permits and manure storage and spread. The family is slowly incorporating technology practices into their operation and is shopping for ear tag monitoring systems.

#### **Department of Planning and Zoning**

***Jen Wilson, Ag Preservation Planner***

Jen works to move farm and undeveloped land into permanent conservation easements that offer payments of up to \$20,000 an acre in the area. This highly incentivized program hopes to secure land for farming practices and thus preserving the ag industry in the area where soils are very productive and fertile. The goal is to place 40% of the county into land conservation.

## **Brooms Bloom Dairy, Bel Air, Maryland**

***Kate Dallam, Owner***

***Emmy Dallam-Beavers***

***Belle Dallam***

A farming family for 28 years, the Dallams have diversified their operations which now include a dairy, restaurant and ice cream shop, and cheesemaking facility. They milk their own cows and turn that milk into multiple products with many retail options. Milk from the facility is turned into ice cream, bottled milk, as well as cheese. They also sell their milk to an Amish family that specializes in it's own branded cheeses. Brooms Bloom is a family operation with two of the Dallam's daughters working in the milking parlor and cheese processing operation.

## **Riehl Farms**

***Sam Riehl***

Being Amish is not a religion, but a culture as per Sam Riehl, and Amish retired farmer and owner of Riehl's Quilts and an on farm gift shop. Sam farmed for 34 years and has now sold his farm to his son who continues the tradition of farming with a horse drawn plow and without the power of electricity from the grid. Solar and generator created power are allowed in the culture. The Amish are exempt from paying social security payments if they are members of an Amish church. There are close to 300 church districts in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and each church district is made up of about 30 families. The church district makes and enforces it's own guidelines so practices among the Amish vary. Some Amish farmers use crop insurance but as a whole, it's seen as a handout from the government.

**Thursday, April 10th, 2025**

## **Mosner Family Brands**

***Seth Mosner, President***

***Michael Braunshwiegher, Operations Manager***

70 years ago the Mosner brand started out of a station wagon selling meat in the NYC area and has since grown into a multifacility business run by the third generation of Mosners. We toured the meat processing facility in the Hunts Point Cooperative market in the Bronx where veal, lamb, goat, and pork products are brought in as carcasses and further processed into ready to cook product. Mosner has grown over the years and now has a plant in New Jersey that produces ready to cook products such as seasoned meats and another plan in Newerk that processes cooked items such as grilled marked, sous vide, shredded products for restaurants, stadiums and e commerce companies such as Hello Fresh.



## **Baldor Foods**

### ***Jared Walton, Director of National Accounts and Sales Operations***

At Baldor Foods we met Jared who took us on a wonderful tour of the produce warehouse that stocks produce and grocery items for many of New York's restaurants. They are also located in Hunt's Point due to the proximity to rail, air, and trucking transportation. One of their biggest struggles is delivery in Manhattan where parking is tricky and access to restaurants can be a problem. Walking the warehouse floor was incredible as we saw products from around the world (and even from my region in Texas) being moved in and out of the facility at a rate of 1.5 days for produce and 4 days for non-produce items. During COVID, Baldor shifted to meet their market by making at home deliveries.

## **NY/NJ Port Authority**

### ***Mike Bozza, Deputy Director, Port Department***

### ***Rado Saragih, Manager, Shipper Outreach***

### ***Dan Gastaldi, Senior Logistics Analyst, Program***

### ***Amanda Valdes, Manager, Business Development and Industry Relations***

### ***Henry Killian, Principal Transportation Planner***

The NY/NJ Port Authority is not just a seaport, but oversees airports, the PATH, tunnels, and the World Trade Center. They are the nation's first bi-state agency and consist of 12 board of directors who are appointed by the governors of New York and New Jersey with six serving from each state. The port was established as a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) in 1934 to encourage US manufacturing with foreign markets.

## **Three Decades of Commodity Market Evolution**

### ***Sal Gilbertie, CEO, President, Chief Investment Officer & Founder of Teucrium***

Sal Gilbertie shared his vast experience in commodities markets, particularly in the areas of trading and liquidity. He has designed a variety of commodity based exchange-traded products ("ETPs") with particular focus on agriculture and energy. Sal explained that gold decoupling resulted as the dollar being king and then the petrodollar as what made the American dollar a global entity. Mr. Gilbertie began his career in commodities with Cargill in 1982; since then he has traded energy and agricultural commodities at Donaldson Lufkin Jenrette, Merrill Lynch, and Bear Stearns. Immediately prior to founding Teucrium Trading LLC, Mr. Gilbertie headed the Renewables Fuels & Commodities Derivatives Over-the-Counter (OTC) liquidity desk for Newedge USA, LLC, a subsidiary of Société Générale (SocGen). While there, Mr. Gilbertie developed the liquidity and the standard contract used today in the ethanol markets.

As we sat at the Port Authority offices listening to our speakers, we sadly heard sirens and emergency vehicles respond to what we would later learn was a deadly helicopter crash into the Hudson River, just across from where we were meeting. Our hearts were heavy as we took the PATH from New Jersey to New York and the 9/11 Memorial. Our group went separate ways for the evening, some of us visiting the 9/11 Memorial and taking in a show. Having just visited New York, I went to see Death Becomes Her while the rest of the theatre goers watched The Six which I had seen two weeks prior.

**Friday, April 11, 2025**

**Minkus Farms, New Hampton, NY**

**Rick Minkus, Owner**

Minkus Family Farms is a packing house for onions that started in 2012. The Minkus family grows about 400 acres of onions in the muck soil in the area but mostly focuses on repacking onions from around the world and then shipping them to grocery stores across the country. One of the biggest challenges the company has faced was the commercial building permits required by the city/county to expand their facility. Rick shared that the onion business is not as volatile as it used to be but market competition still impacts the price of onions.

**Stap's Dairy, Pine Bush, NY**

From New Hampton we headed to Pine Bush where Stap's Dairy is located. This family run dairy milks 120 cows twice a day and sells milk to supply local grocery stores with milk. They partner with Nourish New York to supply dairy products to area food banks. Our cohort was treated to delicious chocolate milk and cheese curds which we enjoyed on the bus.

**Crist Bros Apple Farm, Walden, NY**

Established in 1883, the Crist family has been in the apple business for generations. The currently have 650 acres of apple orchard in Orange County, NY where they grow varieties such as SnapDragon, RubyFrost, Honeycrisp, Gala, Fuji, McIntosh, Pink Lady, Jonagold, Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Empire, Ginger Gold, Macoun, Idared, and Cortland. Apples grown on the farm are picked and stored for up to 6 months in special chamber that filters the nitrogen out of the air and holds apples at specific temperatures for their variety. This technology has extended the shelf life of their apples and allows them to be shipped year round. I was surprised to learn that apple trees are not large. They have been grafted to dwarf stock that allows for easier care and picking. After the apples come out of their specialized storage, they are washed, sorted, stickered and bagged for shipment across the US.

**Halal Pastures, Rock Tavern New York**

Halal Pastures was born out of necessity as Diane, an attorney, and her husband saw a need for Halal meat and organically grown produce to feed their growing family. Diane runs the farm with the help of her family and uses high tunnels and green houses to lengthen her growing season. She pumps water out of the creek to irrigate her produce using drip irrigation and uses plastic mulch for weed control. The family sells or uses all of the produce grown on the farm and feeds any remnants to her chickens which produce organic eggs she is able to sell for \$10 a dozen.

**United States Military Academy West Point**

**Retired Col. Glenn Goldman, Former Director of the Department of Military Instruction**

Our final stop on our Northeast tour was the United States Military Academy at West Point. We were greeted by Retired Col. Glenn Goldman who took us on a bus tour of the academy which was started in 1802 with 10 cadets and now boasts an enrollment of 4,508 cadets. West Point is the



oldest continuously garrisoned location in the United States. We visited the Most Holy Trinity Catholic Chapel which is just one of 7 different faith chapels on campus. We then had a chance to get out and walk around and explore areas overlooking the Hudson River. We wrapped our week together with a meal at the Thayer Hotel before heading back to the city and our flights the next day.

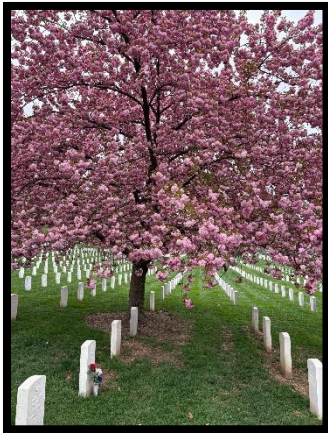
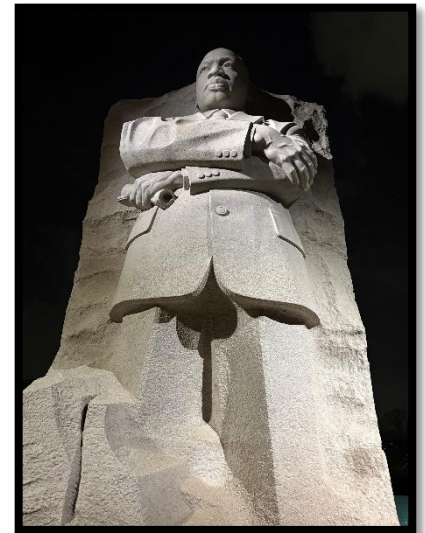
**Darci Luensmann (#15)**

**TALL XIX**

**Session 4 - Washington, D.C. / New York**

**April 5-12, 2025**

Our trip to New York City via Washington, D.C./Maryland/Pennsylvania was jam-packed with adventures both far and wide. We arrived in the Capitol City Saturday evening to tour the **National Mall**. Walking through the terminal, we noticed suits and formality, not seen at many airports across the country. Our guide educated and reminded us of those who came before us and the broad shoulders on which our country stands. The newest statue is of Martin Luther King, Jr., with the theme: *“Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.”* I was blown away by the sheer weight of marble trucked into D.C. It will not be floating in the Potomac anytime soon!



Our free day Sunday was a recharge for the busy week ahead. We brunched and took in Pennsylvania Ave., drank Polish soda waters, cruised to the top of the Waldorf Astoria and checked off my bucket list item: a visit to **Arlington National Cemetery**. The infrastructure and design of each of these memorials nestled among the cherry blossoms was surreal. We watched the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and stood next to the stones of those who gave their lives for our country. Truly, an awe-inspiring testament to our heroes.

Monday, we met with the Chiefs of Staff for the new Secretary of Agriculture – with the promise of a photo opp with her the following day. The Trump administration has flipped agriculture and our economy on its head, and we heard similar sentiments throughout the week as the uncertainty floods the halls of D.C. As someone who has visited during previous administrations, the energy was a 180-degree change.

We ventured into the marble-washed floors of the Rayburn, Longworth and Cannon buildings connected to the Capitol. We met with **G.T. Thompson, Chairman of the House Ag Committee**, where he outlined his priorities. Walking through the Capitol on our tour continued to drive home the patriotic message of pride in our country and those who have shaped it. We also heard from several Congressmen and their staff. I was greeted personally by Rep. August Pfluger who we work very closely with at TSGRA.

**Darci Luensmann (#15)**

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Tuesday, our photo opp promise came to fruition with the **Secretary of Agriculture, Brooke Rollins**. What a time to be in office! The tariffs imposed on other countries have created volatility in the U.S. markets and across the globe. We were encouraged to trust the process and pray for our leaders. I loved hearing that message repeatedly by our leadership – those we voted to lead the charge. These initiatives have been in the works for many years and the time is now to employ them and take our country back. Our administration has never been so focused and aligned.



We visited the **Bush School of Government & Public Service** where we heard from key staffers, leaders of state departments, a lobbyist group, and a professor and expert on the war in Ukraine. Our brains were buzzing with new information.

Leaving D.C., we ventured up through Marland, stopping at a fertilizer distributor, **The Mill at Black Horse**. Located in the efficient black dirt of the northern part of the state, they help farmers be more efficient and effective with their operations. They consider Maryland as “America in miniature” because of its diversity. We learned about the strict regulations of the state’s government and the difficulty facing agriculture with a growing population. It seems everyone has different issues – no matter the location – be it access to land, government regulations, water restrictions or population densities, to name a few.



Lunch at **Broom's Bloom Dairy** featured a delicious clam soup. We washed it down with tasty ice cream. It was so creamy and smooth with very pronounced flavors. I opted for the butter pecan, but made sure my peers' choice of flavors was just as good as mine. Dr. Jim had 2 helpings, and we all wished we did!

We stopped at the **Riehl Farm** where we learned the values and ideology of the Amish in Lancaster, PA. Their farms are immaculate, and they keep their families and traditions close to the vest.

**Darci Luensmann (#15)**

**TALL XIX**

**Session 4 - Washington, D.C. / New York**

**April 5-12, 2025**

When our bus pulled into Times Square after a full day of travel, it was evident the country had come to the city! After one sleep, we were ready for our next adventure. Our first stop Thursday was at **Mosner Family Brands**. They process veal, beef, lamb and goat, but what they offer as a service is manufacturing. Seth's message hit home with us: get busy, get efficient, get smart. My favorite stop of the entire trip: Seth speaking on the challenges of taking over family business. He was direct, honest and we soaked in his wisdom.

Next up: **Baldor Foods**. They deliver produce all over the city – starting early! We were floored by their massive warehouse and logistics. They supply to restaurants, such as the Cheesecake Factory and the World Trade Center. Their warehouse turns over every 2-3 days. It's astonishing when you hear that 2/3 of the U.S.'s population lives east of the Mississippi, but it's another thing to feed it!

Our final stop for the day was at the **New York/New Jersey Port Authority** office. We washed down our city-woes by visiting the oldest bar in America – **Fraunces Tavern** – where we debated the type of whiskey George Washington sipped when he penned his farewell speech there to end the Revolutionary War in 1783.

Friday, we dropped into **Minkus Farms**. They have a simple business plan: take large quantities of onions from the growing regions of the world, repackage into consistent, consumable quantities and distribute to the city. The black dirt where the Farm is located is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest pocket in the U.S. next to the Florida Everglades.

We visited **Stap's Dairy**. It was cold with a wind chill of...burr. We warmed up with cheese curds and chocolate milk. An interesting stop was **Crist's Apple Farm**. Several years ago,



industry developed technology to have fresh apples available all year by chilling the apples in nitrogen and pumping out oxygen in a 33-38F environment. This allows market share and less of the “first to the table” competition. You can harvest when your crops are ready and maintain a customer base through relationships – not cut-throat competition. We watched the process of the apples being washed, shined, sorted, stickered and packaged by size and type. It's amazing the amount of technology that goes into agriculture.





**Darci Luensmann (#15)**

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Our last stop before our last stop was **Halal Pastures** where we enjoyed more black, sticky mud in the cold, bitter air. She and her husband started the farm because they could not find the very best foods for their children, so they have a large garden with organic produce, halal meats, chicken and eggs.

**West Point!** This was such a treat as Dr. Jim's contact through a contact connected with us with a tour guide. Established in 1802 as America's first military school, this taxpayer funded, federal institution feels a bit rigid and stale, but with their core values of Duty-Honor-Country, we appreciated its place in American history. We peered into the Hudson River and felt the presence of George Washington where he established the West Point as "key to the continent" – a lookout for the Army in the fall of 1777.



To see agriculture outside of our element helped me understand the various challenges we all face. If you are breaking even, you are doing good. It's not always about money. Each generation has the responsibility to figure it out on their own. It's our mission and we do not take it lightly.

## **Agriculture Policy Immersion Experience**

*Washington, D.C., Maryland, Pennsylvania & New York | April 7–11*

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### **I. Introduction**

From April 7 to April 11, the cohort conducted comprehensive agricultural policy immersion through site visits, briefings, and strategic meetings in Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, Maryland and New York. The Tall XIX cohort engaged with senior USDA officials, congressional leaders, agricultural trade associations, farmers, processors, and port authority representatives to better understand the current agricultural landscape in the U.S.

The focus areas included:

- The pending 2024 Farm Bill and associated challenges
- Trade and tariff implications on producers
- Agricultural labor policy reform
- Regulatory impacts and sustainability
- Local-level agricultural innovation and resilience

This report outlines the major insights, recurring challenges, and key takeaways from the experience.

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### **II. Federal Agricultural Policy & USDA Priorities**

#### **Farm Bill & Legislative Forecasts**

Meetings with USDA staff and congressional aides underscored the political complexities in reauthorizing the 2024 Farm Bill. Delays in budget reconciliation, discord over nutrition funding (SNAP), and trade aid have slowed legislative momentum.

Jennifer Teller and Ricki Schroeder from the USDA emphasized Secretary Rollins' prioritization of rural prosperity and deregulation. However, disaster assistance remains a pressing concern. While \$34.5 billion in agricultural losses occurred in 2023–24, only \$16 billion in USDA funds are available.

Key issues include:

- The reinstatement of livestock reports like the July Cattle Report.

- Updates to ELAP and Livestock Forage Programs.
- Solar land use conflicts between the DOE and USDA jurisdictions.
- Base acres policy disputes and uncertainty in MFP tariff funding.

### **Congressional Engagement & National Security**

Rep. Michael McCaul's staff highlighted broader security and geopolitical implications, including AI regulation, outbound investment, and trade enforcement. The need for labor reform was a bipartisan topic, particularly through visa system improvements.

The briefing with the Honorable G.T. Thompson revealed a legislative bottleneck: House Ag Committee proposed a \$230 billion cut to SNAP, while the Senate only proposed \$1 billion. At the time of our visit, many expressed that this divide had stalled Farm Bill reconciliation, much like 6 out of 10 recent Farm Bills which were not passed on time.

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### **III. NASDA, Trade Policy & Stakeholder Concerns**

Ted McKinney, CEO of NASDA, and other trade leaders expressed frustration with current U.S. trade strategies. Tariffs, particularly tariffs on China, were viewed as damaging to export competitiveness. Reciprocal, transactional, and permanent tariff structures were discussed, with the consensus favoring transactional mechanisms to incentivize fair trade. Stakeholders advocated:

- Expanded Title I and crop insurance reference prices.
- Preservation of co-op tax benefits (Section 199A).
- Investment in ag-tech and biotechnology to enhance resilience.

Speakers stressed the difficulty of managing in the current economic climate without a comprehensive Farm Bill. Labor shortages and SNAP labeling reform also surfaced as immediate concerns.

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### **IV. Maryland Agriculture & Environmental Regulation**

The field tour in Maryland on April 9<sup>th</sup>, showcased the intersection of federal regulation and local farm adaptation. Maryland farmers face some of the nation's strictest nutrient management laws, requiring any operation with eight animals or more to maintain a certified soil plan.

Key environmental regulations:

- No-till farming covers 85% of corn acreage.
- Cover crop incentives range from \$50–70 per acre.
- Prohibition of phosphorus and nitrogen application post-November.
- Strict manure storage and runoff controls to protect Chesapeake Bay.

Technology adoption was notable. Many farmers utilize drones for pesticide and fertilizer application, improving efficiency and precision. However, as it has here in Texas, solar energy development has sparked concern, with farmland being converted for solar installations, often bypassing local control due to state legislation.

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## **V. New York: Agribusiness & Food Infrastructure**

### **Mosner Family Brands & Baldor Foods**

In New York, the cohort toured Mosner Family Brands, a processor and distributor of various meat products, including Halal meats. The firm's shift to specialty and private-label processing demonstrates the importance of adaptability in a volatile market shaped by tariffs and import pressures.

Baldor Foods, a \$750 million food distribution company, illustrated the scale of logistics needed to feed the East Coast. Operating three facilities with over 3,500 employees, Baldor handles over 6,000 SKUs with a warehouse turnover of 1.5 days for produce. Their practices emphasize traceability, efficiency, and strategic responses to supply chain disruptions.

The Port of NY/NJ plays a pivotal role in East Coast logistics. Responsible for over 8.7 million TEUs in 2023, it remains the largest port on the East Coast and a central node in the national rail network. Officials discussed strategies for increasing rail capacity and foreign trade zone utilization.

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## **VI. Farm Visits: Innovation & Resilience**

### **Minkus Family Farms (Onions) & Crist Orchard (Apples)**

Farm visits in New York showcased how producers are evolving:

- **Minkus Family Farms** uses advanced composting and deals with challenges like annual flooding and high environmental compliance costs. They manage thousands of acres of muck soil and utilize both domestic and imported onions for packing and co-branding.
- **Crist Orchard** leverages Cornell-developed low-oxygen storage to preserve apples for 12 months, allowing year-round supply. Their operation includes automated



quality scanning and specialized handling for major retailers like Walmart and HEB.

### **Stap Dairy & Halal Pastures**

Stap Dairy co-founded a small co-op to process milk in-house after their processor moved away. Their model is centered on short-batch, non-homogenized milk and direct donations through the Nourish NY program.

Halal Pastures is a small-scale certified organic farm led by a former attorney. They focus on soil health, high tunnel growing, and community-based agriculture through CSA shares and farmers markets.

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## **VII. Cultural & Historical Context**

Visits to West Point and local Amish farms added cultural insight into the longstanding agricultural traditions in the Northeast. The Amish community showcased a lifestyle rooted in self-reliance, with many adapting selectively to modern practices like crop insurance and solar power. Their insights emphasized preserving heritage while responding to market demands.

The visit to West Point added a unique dimension to the agricultural policy experience by emphasizing the values of leadership, national service, and historical continuity.

Established in 1802, West Point is the oldest continuously occupied military post in the U.S., with strategic importance dating back to the Revolutionary War.

Tour highlights included:

- A visit to the Cadet Chapel, home to the original 1910 pipe organ.
- Discussion of West Point's four pillars of development: academic, physical, military, and character.
- Insights into mandatory athletics and the legacy of self-discipline and leadership training.
- Learning about West Point's role in national infrastructure, cybersecurity readiness, and agricultural logistics during times of war.

Washington, D.C. and New York City stand as enduring pillars of American history, each shaping the nation's identity in distinct but interconnected ways. Washington, D.C., established as the capital in 1790, was deliberately designed to be the political heart of the country — home to the U.S. Capitol, White House, and federal agencies that influence every aspect of American life, including agriculture policy. Its broad avenues and neoclassical architecture reflect the democratic ideals of the republic, and its role in hosting policy debates and legislation, like the Farm Bill, continues to impact rural

communities nationwide. New York City, by contrast, has long been a global gateway. Once the nation's primary immigration hub at Ellis Island, it became a melting pot of cultures and a powerhouse of commerce. Its rise as a financial and shipping center — particularly through the Port of New York and New Jersey — has made it a critical node in the food supply chain and international trade. Together, D.C. and New York represent the blend of governance and global connectivity that shapes American agriculture from policy to port.

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## **VIII. Conclusion & Reflections**

The D.C. and New York agricultural immersion provided the cohort with a firsthand look at policy development, trade challenges, and producer-level resilience. The contrast between high-level federal strategy and local implementation was stark, reinforcing the importance of cohesive, informed, and bipartisan policy development.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- The 2024 Farm Bill must address disaster relief, labor, trade, and nutrition in a unified manner.
- Producers are investing in technology, conservation, and co-op models to survive market volatility.
- There is an urgent need for regulatory alignment to prevent rural disincentives and unintended consequences of energy and environmental policy.

**Personal Insights:** This experience reinforced the way I view agricultural leadership.

Hearing directly from elected officials, congressional staffers, USDA officials, and family farmers made clear that real solutions require collaboration between those shaping the laws and those living under them. It's one thing to read about the Farm Bill in a briefing document — it's another to stand in a field, barn or storeroom and hear a farmer explain what's at stake.

At Stap Dairy, I saw how innovation isn't always about scale — it's about adaptability and courage. Their decision to co-found a small processing co-op when larger processors left reminded me that community-driven models are essential to rural vitality. Likewise, visiting Halal Pastures revealed how new voices and values are enriching American agriculture with a deeper focus on stewardship, faith, and food justice.

I came away with a re-invigorated appreciation for the cultural dimensions of agriculture — from the discipline of West Point cadets, the adaptability of farmers and ranchers, to the quiet strength of Amish communities. Leadership in this sector demands humility, historical awareness, technical and political acumen, and the willingness to bridge divides.

As someone committed to the future of Texas agriculture, this experience reaffirmed for me the need to stay engaged — not just in production, but in policy, advocacy, and the larger systems that shape our land, labor, and livelihoods.