

## Agriculture Connects Us

By Challey Comer, Blue Apron Foods, Class 16 Fellow



By the time this newsletter arrives in your mailbox, you'll have had your fill of news about the state of politics in our country. So, let me get straight to my point. It is times like these that programs like LEAD-NY are more vital than ever.

Our LEAD class brings a diversity of opinions when it comes to the central issues facing our industry. We discuss labor, biotechnology, consumer opinion and regulation. Regardless of where we stand on these issues, or who we might have voted for, our monthly sessions create an opportunity for us to deepen our understanding of these issues and to gain an appreciation of those whose opinions differ from our own. As an urban dweller (with a funny name and a job title with the word *sustainability* in it), mine is often a minority voice. The relationships I have developed through LEAD have shown time and again that the core values we share are more aligned than they are not.

My career has been built upon connecting rural and urban communities through food. After spending the vast majority of my life upstate, I moved to the city a few years ago. It's a familiar brain drain story.

Education and hitting the upper limit of professional opportunities commutable from the small community where I lived drove the move.

Agriculture is my chosen industry because it allows me to work in service to the land and support the Upstate communities that I care about. I care about vibrant streams with healthy wildlife habitats, supporting our communities through a working landscape, and viable small businesses prepared to transition through many generations to come. Although I now live in the city, I am still able to do work connected to these values.

During our first year in LEAD, I had the opportunity to be on the program team for our visit to New York City. Our time in the city included visits to sites that demonstrate the ways in which city and country meet. Hundreds of thousands of people walk through the Union Square Greenmarket and have the opportunity to buy directly from nearly 150 farmers from across the northeast selling their goods four days a week throughout the year. This is one of the country's largest market sites, but it is also only one of well over one hundred farmers' markets where connections of this type happen. The largest FFA program in the state teaches students in Queens about crop production and animal husbandry at their small on-campus farm. These students also take field trips or complete summer internships on farms Upstate. Food access programs designed to make New York State foods accessible to communities of all

types are the result of the commitment of farmers, policymakers, institutional buyers, and distributors.

The personal development goals I have created for my second year in LEAD are related to showing more confidence in my role as an advocate for agriculture. Today I advocate for the role of our industry in bridging the divide our nation is facing. Let us use agriculture as a vehicle that connects us. As I continue through year two, I will work to gain a better understanding of those whose opinions differ from mine and continue to speak up for the values we share: a commitment to our communities, land stewardship, and vibrant businesses. 🌱



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## A Crisis of Trust? And what LEAD New York tries to do about it

On July 15, 1979, President Jimmy Carter gave one of the most important speeches of his presidency, in which he suggested the United States was suffering from a “crisis of confidence”. Why? Think about what was going on at the time. At home we were dealing with an energy crisis, recession and hyper-inflation. Abroad the Russians had invaded Afghanistan, we were at the height of our “Cold War” with them, and we also had the Iranian hostage crisis, including a failed military rescue attempt. On both domestic and international fronts, our country’s stature had been weakened, and as a country we weren’t feeling too good about the way things were going. Unfortunately, many would argue that our national morale isn’t much better today. But I would argue that today our problems have less to do with a crisis of confidence, and much more to do with a crisis of trust.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** we see an absence of trust in so many aspects of our society, from our national politics right down our local institutions and communities. Allow me to offer a few examples.

It is safe to say that the recent election results surprised many in our country, including political pundits and the media. Since election night, much of the coverage has focused on the question “Why did Donald Trump win?” I think the more important question may be “Why did Hillary Clinton lose?” Though Clinton was arguably far more qualified for the role (having served as First Lady, state senator, Secretary of State, etc.), she had been dogged by one consistent liability throughout her political career: perceptions of “untrustworthiness.” (I’m not suggesting Trump’s integrity is much better, by the way.) Recent LEAD classes will remember a leadership competency activity that we do in our program, in which “trust and integrity” are always identified as competencies that any effective leader must possess. Ample evidence in the management literature also identifies betrayal of trust as a significant contributing factor to leader derailment. In our presidential election, we have seen the effect of that lack of trust. (State government leaders don’t score much better – consider the fact that the recent leaders of both chambers of our state legislature were convicted of corruption charges.)

It’s not just government where there is a dearth of trust, either. Consider all of the scandals surrounding executive leaders in corporate America today – be it in the banking, automotive, pharmaceuticals, insurance, or energy industries – whatever. Let’s use Wells Fargo as one recent example: employees opened thousands of customer accounts without their consent so that they

could meet their sales targets (and so the bank could collect millions of dollars in fees). Sure, when the scandal was uncovered, hundreds of employees lost their jobs, but the executives that lead these efforts? They retired with the proverbial golden parachute.

When I was younger, I remember news anchor Walter Cronkite had earned the title of “most trusted man in America”. Is that true of the media today? One of the reasons we have so many news channels to choose from is that if we don’t like what we hear from one station, we can easily turn to another that has a message more to our liking. Regardless of which network you prefer, far fewer people today would agree that they completely trust what they hear from any news outlet. This is not Walter Cronkite’s journalism anymore.

This crisis of trust appears in cultural and social issues as well. Consider the move by many municipalities throughout our country to require their law enforcement officers to wear body cameras. Certainly, the vast majority of our peace officers are trustworthy and have earned the respect of our citizenry. But because of the questionable actions of a small minority, certain segments of our society have lost faith in the trustworthiness of these public servants, hence the call for widespread use of body cameras, in part to monitor their behavior.

But does this “crisis of trust” trickle down into our industry, into your world? You bet it does.

Dr. Kevin Folta is Chair of the Horticultural Sciences Department at the University of Florida, and this year’s winner of the Borlaug CAST Communication Award (BCCA), a prestigious award presented to those who do a stellar job of communicating in the arena of agricultural science and tech-

nology. At the World Food Prize event this past October, in his keynote address – titled “Unveiling Our Halo – Building Trust with a Concerned Consumer” – Folta stated “Lead with your ethics – facts by themselves won’t work. We need to listen, explain, and gain their **trust** [emphasis added] by developing a shared understanding.”

We’ve heard similar messages from other consumer research. For example, in a recent Farm Credit Canada study, they found that while *farmers* still earn the highest trustworthiness rating (69%) among survey respondents, the ratings drop off steadily as you move up the value chain or increase in size of the organization, with government agencies and food industry organizations earning some of the lowest ratings (35% and 30% respectively). Put another way, while a consumer is likely to *trust a farmer* down the road, they are just as likely to *distrust the industry* that farmer represents. And to underscore the importance of trust, Todd Klink of Farm Credit Canada added: “Trust has more currency than science.”

So what is LEAD New York doing about this crisis of trust? Presidential politics may be a bit out of our league. But we can help our aspiring leaders learn to lead with integrity, earning the trust of their neighbors, customers and colleagues. We have long said that one of the primary outcomes of our program is that we build social capital, and one of the basic tenets of social capital theory is that there exists a norm of mutual trust and reciprocity. Trust begets trust. We begin by trusting each other and earning the trust of those around us. If each of us can do that, then our own little corner of the world becomes a little brighter. And if enough of us do that, eventually our whole world might just start to look a little better. Let’s hope so. 🌱

*AUTHOR’S NOTE: I began writing this article before the results of the recent election were known, and finished it shortly afterwards. Regardless of where you stand on the outcome, the point remains the same. Note that I am not trying to make a political statement, but rather share some thoughts and observations on broader cultural issues in American society. True to the heading of this newsletter section, offering my Perspectives, if you will.*

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# SPOTLIGHT ON...

## Phil Giltner, First Deputy Commissioner, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, Class 13



**LEAD:** Please tell us a little about your current position at NYSDAM – responsibilities, etc.

**PG:** It's hard for me to believe, but I've been at the Department of Agriculture & Markets now for over eight years. For the last three years, I've been Deputy Commissioner. For a while, I was working on the administrative end of the agency's work: being in charge of fiscal affairs, HR, IT, emergency preparedness, and a number of special projects. Since last spring, I'm still working on the agency's IT, but now I'm also in charge of the Agricultural Development Division, Weights and Measures and a number of other topics ranging from county fairs to biofuels. The real highlight of my workweek is to support two of the Governor's marquee projects in our industry, Taste NY and the New York Grown and Certified program.

**LEAD:** What other leadership roles do you serve in?

**PG:** For over three years now, I have been on the board of directors of the Adirondack North Country Association, which is a public-private partnership for social and economic development in the region that ranges from the Thousand Islands down to the outskirts of the Capital District. I also have just joined the board of the Food Bank of Northeastern New York, which covers the region from the Canadian border down to the Putnam-Rockland County area. I try to concentrate on ways that we can improve the quality of life in our rural areas.

**LEAD:** You came in to LEAD class 13 with little to no agricultural background. Now you are a senior administrator with our state department of agriculture and markets. How did LEAD help you prepare for that role?

**PG:** Well, I did do some work in the political end of this world, helping then-congresswoman Gillibrand when she represented eastern NY. But I enrolled in LEAD-NY when I joined Ag & Markets, and did my experience there ever prepare me for what I do these days. Not only do I have a lot of exposure to the industry in New York, it also put me in touch with a tremendous group of people who can help me be effective at my job to promote and protect agriculture and the food system in New York. I

can pick up the phone and find a friend anywhere and in any segment. It's been the real bedrock of my work.

**LEAD:** Your involvement with LEAD since you graduated has been great. You have served as a speaker to subsequent classes on several occasions, you serve on our board of directors, and this winter you will travel with the Class 16 Fellows on their international study trip to SE Asia. Please comment on the value of your continued engagement with the program, and what would you say to other alumni about remaining engaged with the program.

**PG:** Thanks! I thought I was just trying to get out of the house! I actually love doing this sort of thing. I used to be a prep-school teacher and college professor, so I love the give and take of that kind of work. This allows me to keep in touch with those who are in the program and in the industry, to get out there and see what people are doing. I hope also that it helps to keep us all in touch when we are all pretty busy with our day jobs. I think that one of the biggest parts of the program is to be part of that community: when you are an alum of the program, you really can get and give a lot just by staying in touch.

**LEAD:** Beyond advice to alumni, do you have any advice for the current fellows?

**PG:** This question really follows on what I was thinking about with respect to your last question. While the subject matter of LEAD was certainly one of the first things I tell people about, the bigger gain for me has been that I have joined the LEAD network. I can only encourage alumni, current, and future fellows to stay in touch with each other. That's the real enduring value. I tell everyone in the class not to be shy, to reach out to one another, and be open from the start: by the time you get to the end of the course, you will certainly wish you spent more time with your classmates.

**LEAD:** Please comment on the importance of securing applicants for each new cohort that are diverse, talented, robust, etc. Why does this matter for our industry?

**PG:** Again, that's the whole thing about the program. It's not just that we're in the agriculture and food industry.

*continued on page 6*

## Still time to sign up for the LEAD Alumni Trip to Ireland in July!

LEADNY will host its first-ever alumni study trip to Ireland, July 21 – 29, 2017 (with an optional 3-day add-on to Scotland). Quite a few have already signed up, but there is still room for more. The trip will be limited to the first 30 people to sign up. Spouses/partners/adult guests are welcome. For full details, including an itinerary, costs and registration form, please visit [www.worldwide.on.ca/ireland2017](http://www.worldwide.on.ca/ireland2017). This will be an affordable, informative, enjoyable getaway to the “emerald isle”. We hope you will join us!



# NEWS

YOU CAN USE

ALUMNI NEWS, OPPORTUNITIES & EVENTS



## Executive Director completes pre-trip to SE Asia

Larry recently completed a pre-trip to the Philippines and Vietnam, in preparation for the Class 16 Fellows study trip to those countries in February. Suffice it to say, the Fellows are going to have an outstanding educational experience! There is so much going on in that part of world – from natural disaster recovery to significant trade agreements to political changes to climate change and its impact on agriculture and food production – all of which will challenge our Fellows’ critical thinking skills and their world view. It will be a life-changing experience for many. Stay tuned for more information following our trip.

## Class 16 Fellows to hold silent auction at Ag Society Annual Forum

Continuing another tradition, the Class 16 Fellows will hold a silent and live auction in conjunction with the Ag Society Annual Forum. Due to the popularity of the live auction event the past couple of years (lots of items donated and the live auction running late into the night), they have decided to auction off at least some of the items in a silent auction format during the annual forum. Stop by the LEADNY booth in the exhibit/reception room to bid on items, and if you are the successful bidder, you can pick them up following dinner. But not to worry, we will save a few items for the live auction in the hospitality suite – as it has become a fun activity to enjoy. If you have an item you would like to donate, please let Laura Bentley know ([laura@classicteacup.com](mailto:laura@classicteacup.com)) and we will figure out how to get the item from you.

## Help us recruit applicants for Class 17

Even as we are actively engaged in the second year program for our current class, by the time you receive this newsletter our recruitment season for Class 17 will be in full swing. Program staff, alumni, board and current class members will be in attendance at a variety of events throughout the winter months, and we will be running plenty of advertisements and press releases in a variety of industry publications. ***But nothing beats one-on-one recruitment efforts, and YOU are our best recruiters!*** Please think earnestly about a person in your network that would make a good LEAD class member, and then **actively recruit** them to apply to our program. Applications will be available January 3 and will be due March 1. All materials and information will be available via our website at [www.leadny.org](http://www.leadny.org). Please help us recruit a strong applicant pool!

## See you at the NYS Ag Society Annual Forum in January

The NYS Agricultural Society Annual Forum will be Thursday, January 5 at the Holiday Inn, Liverpool. This year’s theme will revolve around partnerships and collaboration, with a slightly new format, including several afternoon breakout sessions offered. As always, this is the single largest gathering of LEADNY alumni of the year, so it’s a great way to catch up with old friends and meet some new ones! And it’s also a great event to bring a prospective LEADNY applicant to, giving them an opportunity to see the tremendous network of leaders that have come out of our program. Consider inviting a prospective applicant to join you that day. Registration information can be found at the Ag Society website at [www.nysagsociety.org](http://www.nysagsociety.org).

## Spotlight... *continued from page 4*

We're in the government and nonprofit industry. We're in the rural leadership industry. This is a big state. We have one of the world's greatest metropolises, and it naturally takes up a lot of people's attention. But it should be remembered that there are 2.3 million New Yorkers who live in rural areas, and that's bigger number than seventeen entire states. We need to make sure we are properly organized and have the leadership we need to make sure we do as well as we can.

**LEAD:** Please share a significant take-home from your LEAD experience... Perhaps a distinct lesson that you learned, your fondest memory from the program, etc.

**PG:** You see and learn so many things in the program, it's hard to pick a single one. Our study trip to Scotland was a great experience, but even some more routine stuff like "Libertyville," the debates, or

Hunts Point all stick out in my memory. However, the single most amazing thing I have seen in this industry was something from the "after session" event we had in Ithaca once: robotic milkers still astonish me.

**LEAD:** Anything else you wish to share?

**PG:** One of my favorite things about LEAD is that every single session has something for everyone. Some things in a regular agenda might be something that you know pretty well—for example, I knew already how to speak in front of a room, having been a teacher for a number of years—but there's always, always, always something to learn. It's also a great chance to see how others are doing out there, to get outside of your daily routine. It's so easy to get into a rut, and the course itself, and your network of LEAD-Grads helps to keep you on your toes. 🌱



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# Happy Holidays!

**Larry Van De Valk, PhD**

Executive Director

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