Since we returned from South Africa, I have been repeatedly asked, “How was the trip?” That is a loaded question. My answer takes either 5 seconds or 20 minutes. I simply say it was amazing and beautiful. Otherwise I need the time to elaborate on all the incredible things I shared with my classmates.

To be honest, the study trip is hard to describe. It wasn’t just a trip. It was a series of experiences that challenged me in many ways. It was a journey that went beyond a 14-hour plane ride. It was the culmination of 18-months of learning about agriculture, the world and myself.

South Africa is a country whose identity is so connected to the past while it tries to figure out its future. The ghost of Apartheid is everywhere. Homes outside the shantytowns are surrounded with high fences and barbed wire. As quickly as the government can build new homes for hundreds of thousands of blacks who were forced to live in townships for decades, thousands of immigrants are lining up to take their places in tin shacks that litter the countryside. Mandela is rightly revered for his lifelong struggle for equality. At the same time, new governmental policies threaten to upend the peace that he fought for.

One of the greatest experiences for the class was a tour through the community of Kayamandi. It is a shantytown. To get there, we passed a Mercedes car dealership just down the street, a sign of the great income disparity that exists in the country. I honestly didn’t expect to go on a tour of Kayamandi, stepping into some of the homes and walking with the children as they got out of school. This was one of those experiences that pushed many of us out of our comfort zones. What we saw was a welcoming community. The children, dressed in pristine school uniforms, smiled from ear-to-ear. The residents were waving hello as we passed.

The homes, with metal walls and few windows, were clean. Those in Kayamandi may not have a lot of personal possessions, but they seemed to have a great deal of pride. We learned that even as they get better jobs and earn more money, they typically choose to stay in the town. They don’t run for the “suburbs” or seek a better life away from family and friends. It honestly made me think about my own value system.

The South African landscape is stunning. Kayamandi is in the heart of the Stellenbosch region known for its lush vineyards. About an hour away is the port city of Cape Town. It sits at the base of Table Mountain, a high peak with a flat plateau. Our hike at the top allowed us to appreciate the sheer beauty of the area and its rich natural diversity. We went on a few game drives at two nature preserves. There is nothing more exhilarating and intimidating than being feet from a wild lion. We discovered that wildlife here too is often in conflict with agriculture. The only difference is that it may be a leopard getting

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American Agriculturist Foundation Increases Endowment Support
Long-time contributor solidifies investment in program's future

The American Agriculturist Foundation (AAF) has been a long-time and significant supporter of LEAD New York. A recent endowment contribution of $333,000 solidifies that support for the long term, and we thank the foundation’s board of directors for making that strategic investment.

In 1935, the stockholders of the American Agriculturist magazine created the American Agriculturist Foundation (AAF). All of the magazine stock was transferred to the Foundation with the charge to continue to develop an independent farm journal while all profits not used to improve the publication were to aid farm youth seeking to secure an education. In 1975, when the publication was sold and separated from the Foundation, the assets of the Foundation increased. Since then, the American Agriculturist Foundation has operated as an independent organization making strategic investments in qualified organizations capable of strengthening the agriculture industry of the Northeastern United States and building capacity among current and future leaders of the industry.

Previously, the AAF has supported the LEADNY program in a number of significant ways. Earlier gifts were used to fund special projects of the program, including an Advanced Leadership Forum in the late 1990s, a Biotechnology Conference in Binghamton in 2001, Local Leadership Enhancement Programs, and a marketing campaign to help improve application rates to the leadership program. More recently, AAF funds have been used to support international study tours and conferences hosted by LEADNY. The AAF has always been a generous annual supporter of our program. This gift, when combined with $167,000 in earlier AAF endowment contributions, means that we will have a half-million dollars of AAF money working to support our program long into the future.

As always, we thank all of our program investors for their support. As the stories in this newsletter convey, the impact of our leadership development efforts is great, and our alumni in turn contribute to a more vibrant food, agriculture and natural resource sector through service to our communities. We hope you would agree!

As this newsletter goes to press, we are in the midst of our selection process for Class 16. Stay tuned for our summer newsletter, in which we look forward to announcing our new class!
Youngblood appointed as Executive Director of the National Organic Coalition
Abby Youngblood (class 13) has been appointed as the Executive Director of the National Organic Coalition (NOC). Prior to joining the NOC, Abby served as the Food and Environment Program Officer at North Star Fund, where she oversaw the growth and development of Community Food Funders, a funder collaborative focused on fostering a sustainable regional food system. She also previously worked for Just Food in NYC, and is the former co-owner and operator of a vegetable farm in upstate New York. The NOC is a national alliance of organizations working to provide a “Washington voice” for farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, consumers and industry members involved in organic agriculture. Congratulations, Abby!

Jacobs leading the way for new Troy Farmer’s Market facility
After 20 years with his local land trust, Seth Jacobs (class 11) has taken the helm of the Troy Waterfront Farmer Market board, with the goal of working to secure a solid future for this great regional market. Things have progressed rapidly, as they just received a $1.5 million grant from NYS Empire State Development, which will cover half the cost of their share of a new building in downtown Troy. It will be a mixed use 7 story building, with 50 residential units above, and the first two floors for a permanent home for the market. Through this site, the organization can really expand their role in the community, and link local agriculture to the urban population of the Capital District. Says Seth: “It’s great stuff, and my LEAD experience and the connections I made in the program are a big part of making it happen.” Keep up the good work, Seth!

LEADNY alumni serving on the NEAFA board of directors
At their annual meeting this past February, the Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance (NEAFA) elected new board members and officers, and LEADNY is well represented among them. Rick Zimmerman (LEAD board member) serves as the organization’s Executive Director, and Andy Dugan (class 8), Chip Hyde (class 6) and Corwin Holtz (class 7) all serve on the board. In addition, Andy Dugan was also elected Vice President. Congratulations to you all!

LEADNY alumni running for seats on the Farm Credit East board of directors
Laurie Griffen (class 5) is running for re-election to represent the Central Region on the Farm Credit East board of directors, and Peter Call (class 3) is running for a seat to represent the Western Region on that board. Andy Gilbert (class 4) currently serves as the board chair, and Doug Shelmidine (class 3) also serves on the board. Good luck to the candidates!

Thomas elected as Class 15 representative on LEADNY board of directors
Several years ago, the LEADNY board of directors adopted a policy of allowing each graduating class to elect their own representative to our board of directors. Four class members ran for the seat, and Amie Thomas (class 15) was elected by her peers. Thanks to all four class members who offered to give back to the program through service on our board, and congratulations to Amie!

We’ve Moved!
Now that the Warren Hall renovation is complete, our office has moved back over to that building. Our new address is: LEAD New York, 275B Warren Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853. Telephone, email and website will all remain the same. If you are in the neighborhood, stop in for a visit!

Save the date: ILAC in Colorado, August 5-8, 2015
The Colorado Ag Leadership Program (CALP) is pleased to announce they are the hosting the 2015 International Leadership Alumni Conference (ILAC) August 5-8, 2015 in Denver. For additional information about ILAC, CALP and its commitment to leadership development, please visit www.ilac-conference.com or www.coloagleaders.org.

If you have news to share…
If you have news to share, please send it to ljv4@cornell.edu. This might include your own promotions, service activities, honors or awards. We can also run short pieces about funding or job opportunities, as well as upcoming events that might be of interest to our newsletter readers. We might even post your news on our website. Help us promote the good work that LEAD alumni do by sharing your news with us!
**LEADNY thanks** the following individuals and businesses who have invested in the future leadership of our industry and communities:

**Over $50,000:**
Northeast Agricultural Education Foundation, Inc.

**Over $10,000:**
BASF Corporation – Kate Wheeler
CHS Foundation
Cargill Incorporated
Eastern Produce Council

**$5,000 - $9,999:**
Friends of Pro-Fac Fund
Laurie and Steve Griffen
Jim Vincent

**$2,500 - $4,999:**
Lowell Smith Circle of Courage Fund
Erie and Niagara Insurance
New York Wine & Grape Foundation
Walnut Ridge Dairy (Hardie, Palladino, Fleming)
Dairy Farmers of America
New York Farm Bureau

**$1,000 - $2,499:**
New York Corn & Soybean Growers Association
Upstate Niagara Cooperative, Inc.
Corwin Holtz
Keith Pierce
Saputo Dairy Foods
Roger Lamont
Jonathan Burns
Brett Kreher
Kast Farms – John Kast
Bentley Bros. Inc.
Long Island Farm Bureau
McCormick Farms, Inc.
Midstate Mutual Insurance
NBT Bancorp
NYS Agricultural Society
Northeast Ag. and Feed Alliance
Mark Bitz
Peter Call
Kurt Kreher
Ken Mattingly
Dave Rockwell
Sunoco, Inc.
Greg Wickham
Craig Yunker

**$500 - $999:**
Edwin Fessenden
Northeast Dairy Producers Assoc.
United Apple Sales
John Mueller

**$250 - $499:**
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Triple Crown Nutrition, Inc.
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Harold Smith
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Karen Cartier
Scott Keyes
Donald Bay
George Casler
Russell Kelly
Michael Oleksak
Mark Russell
Judith Smith
Beverly Stamp
Theodore Wells
Kate Wheeler
Ryan Hrobuchak
Steven Ammerman
Kristine Rogers-Gansz
Gramco, Inc.
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Yankee Farm Credit, ACA
Henry Adams
Gregory Albrecht
Tricia Bauer
Briana Beebe

**$100 - $249:**
New York Farm Bureau

**$50 - $99:**

**$25 - $49:**

Class 15 Fellows Travel to South Africa... continued from page 1

into the barn as opposed to deer eating up a New York field.

We spent time at many farms during the 12-day trip, including a week in the central part of the country in and around Johannesburg. Agriculture contributes three percent to the gross domestic product of the country. There are around 35,000 commercial farmers in the country with another 250,000 small enterprises and around 2 million subsistence farmers who raise food for personal needs. Some of the biggest exports include citrus, grapes and wine.

Many of their farmers’ issues are our issues. They have concerns over regulations and labor. They are trying to remain competitive in a global economy. At the same time the country is undergoing major land redistribution programs to place more farmland into the hands of blacks that had been repressed during Apartheid. In addition, there are serious energy and political challenges that are also big hurdles for farmers. They question if farming will have a future in the country. If there is hope, it will come from places like Sabina Khoza’s training center where she is teaching young blacks how to farm so they are not set up for failure.

It was a different school where we concluded our trip. The African Leadership Academy is looking to inspire a diverse set of students from across the continent. The lack of leadership is a problem in Africa, but not here. The students are given the skills and the attitude to think big picture. They are being prepared, we were told, to create jobs that don’t yet exist and solve problems that have yet to be conceptualized.

Lions were among the many species of wildlife Class 15 Fellows came in close contact with. We also learned about the importance of wildlife and ecotourism to the South African economy.
This resembles much of the philosophy of LEAD NY. We are developing leadership skills, self-awareness and an understanding of the importance of civic engagement. The trip to South Africa provided a unique opportunity for the class to better understand different cultures and gather a wider perspective of the world that we live in today. By doing so, we have a better appreciation for where we each come from and how we want to make things better for New York.

So how was my trip? It was a series of glorious moments. Touching the jail bars that confined Nelson Mandela for 18 years. Watching African wild life at sunset. Eating crocodile for the first time. Laughing late into the night with 25 dear friends. It was just plain amazing and beautiful.

On one of many farm visits, Justin Mortensen lends a hand with the carrot harvest. Notice he cannot balance the crate as well as the ladies can!
We are pleased to announce that Robert A. Smith, LEAD Class 1, will be the sixth recipient of the Empire State Food and Agricultural Leadership Institute's Outstanding Alumni Award (OAA). This award was established to recognize the outstanding leadership our graduates provide to the LEAD New York Program, their local communities, and the food, agriculture and natural resource industries.

With over 400 alumni, the selection committee’s task was especially difficult as so many of our graduates have made significant contributions to our industry and communities throughout the Northeast. Personal testimonials spoke volumes about the leadership style of this year’s recipient: “In addition to his substantial professional accomplishments, Bob really gave back to the LEAD New York program. During his tenure on our board, he served

Editor’s note: You may wonder why we don’t have a better picture of Bob here. Well, this humble leader has been described by his colleagues as very “camera shy”, which may explain why we had trouble locating many pictures of him. In this Class 1 group photo, Bob is 6th from the right in the front row.

Empire State Food and Agricultural Leadership Institute
Class 1 (1985—1987)
Washington D.C. February, 1987

MY, HOW FAR WE’VE COME...
as chair of an ambitious endowment campaign. Today, the program benefits greatly from that foresight and hard work.” said Larry Van De Valk, Executive Director of the program.

Smith serves as executive vice president and corporate secretary for Farm Credit East, which he joined in January 2007. Bob’s responsibilities cover public policy, marketing and communications, business planning coordination and Farm Credit East’s Knowledge Exchange program. Prior to joining the largest financial cooperative in the Northeast, Bob served as CoBank’s vice president for governmental relations, responsible for COBANK’s Washington, D.C. office. Prior to that time, he was the executive assistant and deputy commissioner for the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets as well as the assistant secretary to the governor of New York under Governor Mario Cuomo (from 1989-to-1992). Before joining the Department of Agriculture and Markets, Bob was the director of governmental relations and communications for New York Farm Bureau.

A graduate of Cornell University and Class I of LEAD NY, today Bob sits on the New York State Fair Advisory Board as well as the American Farmland Trust New York Advisory Council. He served on the Board of LEAD New York from 1992 to 1994 as well as on the initial Board of the New York Farm Viability Institute. In addition, Bob chaired the Empire State Council of Agricultural Organizations.

Bob has testified and conducted briefings before congressional and New York State legislative committees. He is an integral force in the advancement of Farm Credit East’s Knowledge Exchange Program, which provides informational programming on emerging agricultural issues along with financial and economic trends facing Northeast agriculture. Through this program, Bob and his colleagues develop reports that support Northeast agriculture and that they share with public policymakers. In addition, Bob has coordinated the Farm Credit Northeast AgEnhancement Program since its 1996 inception. This program has provided $1.6 million in grants to support youth, young farmer and agricultural development projects.

The award will be presented at the LEAD Class 15 Fellows commencement ceremonies on Friday, April 17, 2015. The celebration will take place at the Country Club of Ithaca. All LEAD alumni, and Bob’s friends and colleagues, are encouraged to attend and help us recognize this exemplary leader. For more information, contact Larry Van De Valk, Executive Director of LEAD New York at 607-255-7907 or at ljv4@cornell.edu. 📌
YES, I recognize the tremendous value of the LEAD New York program and wish to support it with a gift.

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If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to LEADNY, please fill out and mail in this form with your contribution to: LEADNY, Cornell University, 275B Warren Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853.