

Class 16 Fellows Study Trip to SE Asia Reflections on their experience in the Philippines and Vietnam

Editor's Note: Normally we ask a current class member to write the cover story for each newsletter. In this issue, we drew comments directly from the study trip evaluation report, so effectively all of the class members wrote this piece. Evaluation questions are paraphrased in bold.

Which portion of the trip was most useful to you? What did it teach you, or how will you put that to use?

Where to begin? I am very much a tactile and visual learner, so being present at many of the operations, walking barefoot on the farm soil, swimming in the coral reef, listening to wildlife/birds in the rainforest, etc. are all experiences I wish not to soon forget. Beyond the memories shared with classmates during these amazing experiences, I feel compelled to protect our resources, value our security, and support our community.

It wasn't until Thursday while I was still processing the trip, it came to me what I learned. I realized that I have the opportunities, the abilities and the means (education, tools, and finances) to make a difference within my industry and community. I will not sit by the side and allow things just to be and not engage.

I really enjoyed going to all of the small community farms. A lot of times we tend to think that we need to do everything on our own. We get stuck in the thought of 'this is my business and I have to do everything I can to make my business grow'. Sometimes we forget that we can lean on our neighbors

for help if a certain issue comes up. I feel like we do work together within our own sectors of farming, but can the different sectors within a community cross over and work together for a common goal?

The confidence that I gained from this experience alone will be put to use in my life and all aspects of it. This trip will be a reminder that stepping out of more than one comfort zone and surviving, thriving and learning is a cherished gift that is often pushed aside and taken for granted. This new found confidence will give me the strength to move forward in my endeavors in agriculture.

Personally, I want to continue to work in some capacity in the international development field, because I do believe that it's a human responsibility to help others when and where we can...and I saw a lot of

opportunities for cross-cultural partnerships and learning.

These businesses also gave me a much better understanding on how much work goes into the products that we import. Many of the products I sell on a daily basis are imported from the countries we visited so it helped me gain a broader understanding of the challenges associated with getting these products to market.

I was touched by the graciousness of the locals and humbled by their willingness to share the little that they had with us. Seeing all of this made me appreciate so much more what I have at home and made me realize where my "first world problems" rank in the grand scheme of things. I hope to be able to take this experience and find a way to get involved in some sort of outreach or mission work in other areas of the country.

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By Larry Van De Valk,
Executive Director, LEAD New York



66,491 Pounds of Carbon The price we pay to develop a broader world view

I'll spare you the calculation, but suffice it to say that LEADNY Class 16 Fellows put about 67,000 pounds of CO₂ into the atmosphere during our recent trip to the Philippines and Vietnam. And that's just our share of the airline emissions getting from our homes in Upstate New York to SE Asia and back. If you tack on the ground transportation for both here and there, we could be approaching the 100,000 pound mark.

Given that one of the major topics explored during this trip was climate change and its impact on food security in developing countries, it seems appropriate to share our own carbon emissions in getting there. You might even wonder, how could we legitimize a trip that contributes – through our substantial carbon emissions – to one of the very problems we hope to address? Perhaps it's the price we have to pay to get to a longer-lasting solution.

In his book *A New Psychology for Sustainability Leadership: The hidden power of ecological worldviews* (2015) author Steve Schein suggests that the leaders of the most

...IF YOU REALLY WANT TO
UNDERSTAND THE WORLD,
EVENTUALLY YOU WILL
HAVE TO GET OUT IN IT.



sustainable companies and organizations on the planet share one thing in common: they all hold what he calls an “ecological world view”. In a nutshell, his research suggested that these leaders see themselves (and the companies or organizations they lead) as part of a larger, global, interdependent ecological system. They did *not* view the impact of their operations as being limited to a specific industry sector, geographical location, political boundary, etc. Like many native cultures, they saw their presence as taking place in – and being part of – a larger ecosystem, not as being master over it.

The question is, just how did these “sustainability leaders” develop that ecological world view? Dr. Schein's answer: nearly all of them had at least one significant international life experience. We're not talking vacations to exotic places and sandy beaches. He is referring to crucible experiences, like intensive study travel to developing countries, to learn about the impact of their actions on people all around the world. Sound familiar? That's exactly what we do on LEAD New York study trips. We didn't travel to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam to learn exactly how Vietnamese farmers grow rice so that we could do the same – because I don't see us growing a lot of rice in New York any time soon. We did travel there to learn how rising sea levels, reduced fresh water flow from upstream industrial development, and saltwater intrusion are all affecting this breadbasket's ability to feed one of the most densely populated regions on earth. And we considered how our actions (e.g. energy consumption, consumerism, and trade) might be contributing to those problems. And we learned so much more.

I have often used the analogy that if you want to be an airline pilot, eventually you have to fly a plane. You can learn a lot about flying a plane by reading books, taking classes, and even spending time in a simulator. But if you want your pilot's license, eventually you are going to have to put in the hours behind the stick in the cockpit. And so it is if we want to develop leaders that “think globally, and act locally”. We can learn a lot about the world from reading books, taking classes, listening to speakers, and so on. But if you really want to understand the world, eventually you will have to get out in it. I don't know a lot of “worldly leaders” with global perspectives that haven't seen a good chunk of the world.

But don't take it from me, take it from that wisest of American authors, Mark Twain:

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.”

I couldn't agree more, and that is why travel is an important part of our curriculum. It challenges pre-conceived notions. It shatters misperceptions. It opens minds. It broadens perspectives. It encourages critical thinking. It builds richer, ecological world views. **It helps develop better leaders.** That is what we are about, and as the preceding article suggests, our Fellows seem to have learned the lesson. 🌱



STUDY TRIP TO SE ASIA...



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The Neuroscience of Trust

For those of you that enjoyed my last *Perspectives* article - titled "A Crisis of Trust?" - the Harvard Business Review published an article shortly thereafter titled "The Neuroscience of Trust".

Author Paul J. Zak suggests that building a culture of trust makes a meaningful difference in employee engagement, retention, and performance, among other organizational benefits. In addition to providing his experimental evidence, he offers suggested management activities that likely lead to a more trusting environment. You can find the article at: <https://hbr.org/2017/01/the-neuroscience-of-trust>.

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. This will be an affordable, informative, enjoyable getaway to the "emerald isle". We hope you will join us!



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.

RECRUITMENT UPDATE: Largest applicant pool in over two decades!

As this issue goes to press, we are actively engaged in the selection process for class 17. I am happy to report that we had our largest and most competitive applicant pool in the past 20 years! Suffice it to say that the selection committee and board will have some very difficult decisions to make as we select the successful candidates. Thanks to all of you that helped us recruit such a well-qualified pool of applicants. Stay tuned this summer when we announce the class 17 roster.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

ALUMNI NEWS, OPPORTUNITIES & EVENTS

Jessica Ziehm (class 10) to receive Outstanding Alumni Award

Jessica Ziehm, Executive Director of the New York Animal Agriculture Coalition, has been selected as this year's recipient of the LEAD New York Outstanding Alumni Award. Recipients are recognized for their outstanding leadership service and their positive impact on their industry, organizations and their community. The award will be presented at the Class 16 Fellows Commencement Ceremony on Friday, April 21 at the Country Club of Ithaca. All LEAD alumni are invited to attend. Please contact our office for reservation details.



Congratulations go out to Jay Hardenberg, class 13

Jay is currently serving on the Board of Trustees at his local Federated UMC/ELCA church. He is also the newly elected treasurer for the local town library board and was elected to the National Grape Cooperative Board of Directors in February. We wish Jay well in these new leadership roles.

Class 16 Fellows Study Trip to SE Asia... *continued from page 1*

What about your personal goals for this trip - what were they? Did you get out of this trip what you had hoped to accomplish?

I had one nice exchange with a waiter where I thanked him for speaking English with me and apologized for not speaking Vietnamese. This opened him up to tell me about how he wishes to study in the United States. This taught me that expressing your feelings of humility can be important to building connections with others. I now have a goal to make an effort to brush up and learn more foreign languages so that I can at least make an effort when I travel. The trip also made me want to travel more with my children to provide them with different perspectives about the world.

The kids we met at the school and the community farm were amazing and so full of joy. The farmers were all so eager to show us their farms. The pride they felt for what they had made me rethink the way I look at my business. I feel I'm a more humble and grateful person for having taken this trip.

What surprised/shocked you the most during this trip?

An important cultural difference I've been thinking about is that individuals in developing countries are forced to own their externalities in ways we don't appreciate. We are fortunate to live in a country that can afford to invest in our public infrastructure.... I want to remember that there are realities I don't already appreciate or see when I'm traveling and to not make judgments of what others are dealing with.

I was worried about the political climate in the Philippines, but after having a few discussions with local people, I realized that my fears were for not. I came away from this trip looking at the world and my own life differently. I feel a lot more thankful for what I have and where I live.

I do feel grateful that we live in a country that mostly has a safe water supply and that we are able to irrigate our crops with clean water and keep our food in temperature safe conditions. I was also surprised by the true meaning (and face) of poverty, namely in the Philippines....and what that meant for people and the conditions they lived in. Many were subsistence farming ...and living conditions were just not what I expected. I was humbled by the experience and grateful for all that I have. I hope I can hold onto that gratitude forever and instill that in my

children, because we truly are lucky to live where we do.

The study trip is the capstone event, bringing together much of what we learned during the previous 18 months. Now that we are nearing the end of your LEAD experience, how are you "connecting the dots" from multiple seminars, lessons, topics and discussions to develop a richer worldview of food, agricultural and natural resource issues?

After we returned from the trip and I was catching up on the news I missed, I noticed I was passively considering how what I was reading would affect SE Asia. Even though my thoughts about issues will still contain my own biases, continually and passively considering things from a different perspective is definitely "things coming together" for me.

People are people no matter where they live. I am continually amazed at the similarities in the motivations and challenges faced by the farmers we've met. I am grateful that we have a shared industry to bring us together. Something I've learned is to seek the connections that will resonate the most with our host and to not place my own expectations on their experience. We sometimes asked the host farm or speaker about regulations or inspections, but we should have been listening more for the most vital issues on their minds and asked questions about that.

I think the study trip shrinks the world, but increases opportunity. People on the other side of the world are not that different and there is much to learn and offer each other. Feel confident to step out of 'your' comfort zone.

I think in viewing global issues as we did on this trip, there are many connections back to the local level and how international policies affect local populations. I think this trip highlighted the issues of food production and hunger on the world scale. The US is just one actor, albeit an important one, in the global food system, and I think seeing methods/policies of food production/hunger prevention in other countries highlighted this. I often hear how US farmers are feeding the world, but personally I thought it was humbling to be reminded of how much food production occurs outside of the US. Also, I think this trip was a good reminder that not all food produced in the US is consumed widely in other countries

(i.e. dairy). This reinforced the importance of trade for US producers; it also showed that the US will face increased competition from other countries in terms of food production as more countries develop. In terms of hunger, this trip reinforced to me that hunger is not about food production but about access to food.

Before LEAD I was in my own little world not caring about where all my food came from or what issues other people around the world may be having. I knew a lot about my industry but not a lot about much else. I tend to think about agriculture as a whole now and not just specific parts as much. I think not only can the world learn from us but that we as the United States can learn from the world, whether it be good or bad.

I have held a small leadership role in my community throughout my time in this course, and I think LEAD has given me the foundation to further that role. I was not comfortable speaking in public, which has changed. I am more confident in my belief that agriculture needs to remain a backbone industry in my community and have been thankful for the opportunity to witness all the different parts of agriculture that I didn't know. I think I will be processing this trip and this class for years to come.

The trip allowed for me to gain a broader perspective on life. I'm more confident in connecting the dots and sharing my opinion.

Things are coming together in the sense that what we do here, greatly affects the livelihood of people elsewhere, and vice versa. The importance of sharing knowledge and education resonated with me. The importance of good international policy was driven home on this trip. The importance of research... both Ag research and research into how we feed a growing population. Dare I say it, but I found myself in some capacity, as the defender of GMO's on this trip...a role I don't often assume. I felt small on this trip...in a very positive way.

This has helped me realize that we need to think of the bigger picture. Too often we think small scale because it's safe. We need to stop thinking small and start reaching out globally.

I think the greater "connect the dots" lesson from the program and trip is the importance of collaboration in leadership. Without policy or cultural changes based on research the work of researchers may be

ineffective. Without listening to researchers the work of politicians or farmers may be ineffective. We see the importance of minds from different sectors coming together to address issues and ask the right questions. I think that is what LEAD is about, learning how to ask the right questions, learning who to ask, and expanding your access to people to ask questions of.

It's so amazing to me to think about what many consider the over regulation of Ag and other business in our country and then to go other countries and see what appears to be a complete lack of regulation in food safety and agricultural practices. It makes me wonder where that happy medium is that would possibly put everyone on a level playing field. An obvious lack of infrastructure seems to hold them back in creating new sources for revenue and here we are in the US, making sure our rows are as straight as possible with GPS.

I came back from the study trip with a great appreciation for overall country infrastructure (political, physical, and economic), food safety and security, as well as how efficiently we can circulate knowledge. These are all areas that we have touched on in the past 18 months and travelling to SE Asia allowed us to see some countries with many of these things in their infancy. I came back with the feeling that despite our country's perceived dysfunction at times, we have the tools and resources to learn and disperse knowledge.

In previous seminars, you were introduced to some large, complex issues like climate change and trade. How did this study trip affect your level of awareness of these issues, deepen your critical thinking, or change your perspective on any of them?

Climate change directly impacts my operation and so I felt like the trip to Can Tho and the university has revisited me several times since returning to NYS.... I'm thinking, 'how can I act and influence others to help prevent further detriment to our soils and water systems?' Climate change is a global issue that manifests differently across the globe, but being in countries that are so immediately affected by climate change and getting to speak with people in those countries about climate change deepened my awareness of this issue. Reading about climate change is one thing, but it does not substitute for seeing it and hearing about it first hand from those that are directly

affected by it. We've talked in class before about "giving climate change a face"; I think much of this trip did just that.

What resounded most with me was the impacts of climate change. The real, tangible, devastating impacts of climate change. And what concerns me the most, is that to some degree, the impacts of climate change have just begun.

This trip really put into perspective the issues associated with climate change... We are somewhat sheltered from the larger impact of climate change in upstate NY but it became very real during this trip.

If you had to pick one thing that you saw in SE Asia that we should emulate back home, what would that be? Why? How about one thing you think we should avoid? Why?

When we asked our host at the AgriTech Park in Vietnam about why we were meeting so many female farmers, he seemed surprised. He told us that women are great business owners and that, since they're an equal part of the population, they should have an equal amount of ownership of businesses. He talked about women being good managers and decision makers. I appreciate that women have more of a role in American agriculture than the past, but we could learn from this view in which it's not unique, or even notable, that a farm that is large for its region to be directed by a woman.

Culturally, I think being less wasteful is something we should practice more. I know in the regions we visited this is an economic issue... but I think the American cultural expectation to be a constant consumer does not actually increase our quality of life proportionately, nor is it being a good steward of limited resources. In SE Asia we saw all parts of food products being used, and middle class families that had far fewer possessions than their American equivalents. Again, I know this is partly out of necessity, but I think most Americans in the middle class take their consumption for granted. There were some government policies on this trip that we encountered that seemed detrimental to me, with one of the ones that struck me the most being Vietnam's policy of overproduction of rice. This "rice first" policy degraded farmland, resulting in unsustainable practices and problems for farmers in the long run. I think our country could avoid policies such

as this that prioritize short-term gain at the expense of long-term outcomes.

The sense of community in Leyte was refreshing. I had the opportunity to talk to a gentleman about his life just after Typhoon Haiyan, and he talked about the grief that he felt over lost loved ones, but then talked about how his neighborhood started to reconstruct and move forward as a community. He talked briefly about NGO's coming in to help, but he dwelled on how the community came together and worked together. I'm sure a lot of that has come from years of rebuilding after a nasty storm, but the sense of pride the community has is something the US can learn from.

A cultural practice that I adore in SE Asian cultures is that of hospitality. I would say almost all of the people we met with were living in conditions of extreme poverty, by western standards, yet they were so giving with everything they had. It was humbling. That's something I think America could use some practice with.

I was impressed by the deference shown to women in business in Vietnam. I think the majority of the farm owners we met were women. I think women should be taken more seriously in the US, not only in Ag, but in all business ventures. Regardless of gender, people have many different perspectives and abilities to bring to the table in business.

What did you learn that was "off the script" - not part of the planned agenda items?

I appreciated talking to Ms. Brenda, from the Philippines tour group, about the effect of family members traveling abroad for work. She told me about a couple who may be getting a divorce and the problem was created by physical separation from work abroad. It made me think about families of undocumented workers and the permanent separation they go through and the difficulties that lie ahead if we have mass deportations that could separate people from their families and their communities. It was interesting to hear how the Filipino culture is very family oriented (people travel home for funerals etc.) yet there is a great reliance on income from foreign jobs that splits families apart. I believe the same is true for our Mexican and Latin American neighbors. 🌱



SE ASIA STUDY TRIP



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