



## Reflections on Class 15 Year 1

By Dan Welch, Class 15, NY FarmNet/Farm Link

It seems like only a couple of weeks ago that I met my classmates at Camp Oswegatchie in late September.

In reality year 1 of LEAD NY was spread out over eight months, and in that time the class toured several parts of Upstate New York, participated in the NYS Agricultural Society Meeting in Syracuse, and visited New York City. Across all our sessions, we learned more about ourselves, our classmates, agriculture and food, and of course, leadership.

Year 1 was full of great experiences and unique opportunities, but one of the most surprising things to me was how much I learned about myself. The process of self-discovery began at Oswegatchie with the results from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and learning the strengths and weaknesses of each personality type. Each of the class members also gave an introductory presentation about themselves to the class. Preparing for this assignment gave me space to reflect on what values are important to me, and the events that have shaped my involvement in agriculture. At the Rochester session the theme of self-awareness continued with information from the 360 assessment. Ratings from supervisors, colleagues, and employees on several leadership traits fed into the report. The feedback received through this instrument gave me several areas to improve on to be a more effective leader. Even at the sessions where there wasn't a focus on self-assessment, I found myself being more reflective of each experience and its impact on me.

LEAD Alumni that I know have always told me one of the most important benefits of participating in the program was the interaction with your classmates. Looking at the class roster last summer I could see the value in networking with agricultural professionals from across that state with a variety of backgrounds. What I didn't know at the time was that not only would our class build a network, we were developing friendships that would support us throughout the year. Whether it was talking about the joys of family, frustrations at work, or our reactions to a tour, there was always a supportive classmate to listen. In contrast to the discourse that is sometimes on display in Albany or Washington, our class respectfully debated some of the critical issues facing agriculture today. We formally debated a few of these issues at our session in Syracuse, and the discussions continued informally on the bus and at meals. It was inspiring to see that we could have a civil conversation on GMOs with conventional farmers, an organic grower, and an agricultural chemical company representative. I learned from all of my classmates based on their unique background and position in the agriculture and food system.

A program that is dedicated to developing leadership in the agriculture, food, and natural resources sectors wouldn't be complete without tours of farms, related agricultural businesses, and food processors. Like most of the class, I was much more familiar with the practices and issues facing production agriculture. I was much less familiar with the food-processing sector, and perhaps had the least knowledge about food distribution and retailing. One of the takeaways for me in Year 1 was the

vast diversity of consumers in New York and the Northeast that rely on our farms to meet their needs. At the Wegman's store in Pittsford we were able to learn more about what a suburban consumer is looking for in their weekly shopping. This could be contrasted with what a shopper in New York City wanted in their several trips during the week to a Whole Foods store. Our class was also exposed to another type of consumer that I know I hadn't thought of; those that are dealing with food insecurity. In Rochester, we went from the dizzying array of choices at Wegman's to the warehouse of FoodLink, the regional food bank for sections of the Finger Lakes and Western New York, to a soup kitchen serving the poor and hungry. In one session you could clearly see the challenges of meeting some consumers' demands for local, organic, gluten free, etc., while also ensuring that food is available and affordable for those struggling to put food on the table.

In our tours of food processors and distributors, my definition of a consumer was further broadened by the focus on a local, regional, or national market. *(continued on page 3)*

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## Perspectives By Larry Van De Valk, Executive Director

### Spring: A Time of Transitions Class 15, Board of Directors and Other Updates

As I sit in my home office writing this article – shivering in front of a heater – I wonder if spring will ever really arrive. But the chickens outside my window are scratching happily, and we had our first asparagus from the garden last night, so it seems spring may be here after all. Spring is a hopeful transition period, and I’m happy to share a few transitions and other news below.

First, Class 15 completed the Leadership Fundamentals portion of our program last month. Based on their monthly evaluation reflections and year two application responses, it was clear that a lot of growth and learning had occurred over the past nine months. Most of them are prepared and eager to begin serving in a variety of leadership roles and projects in the coming year. We are also pleased that 28 class members will continue their leadership development journey as a LEAD Fellow – see the sidebar for a list of cohort members. The board of directors and I look forward to helping these Fellows broaden their perspective, as we turn our focus beyond New York State in the coming year, with trips to Washington DC, Ottawa, and Kenya.

***“I look back on the past year and I can’t believe how much I have grown and changed as a result of LEAD. I know other class members feel the same. I knew LEAD was going to be good, but I was not prepared for just how profoundly it would affect me. I can’t wait to see how year 2 stretches me.” – Member of Class 15***

Speaking of the board, Laurie Griffen and Bruce Krupke both completed their second, 3-year term, and Chris Nyberg finished his term as president. We thank them all for their service. Karen Cartier was elected president for the coming

year, and Brian Monckton will serve as vice president. Our board continues to take an active, sincere interest in the welfare of the program and the experience of the class members. As always, it has been a pleasure to work with them.



News on the fundraising front continues to be positive as well. Thanks in part to the loyal support of our program alumni and the companies they represent, we exceeded our annual fundraising goal for the current year. Significant, repeat investors like the Northeast Agricultural Education Foundation continue to sponsor major events like the study trip. And we were happy to attract new major investors like the CHS Foundation, who sponsored our local leadership seminar in Cortland last month. Please see the roster in this newsletter for a complete list of those that have made an investment in the leadership capacity of our industry and communities through class 15.

Finally, our networking efforts continue to grow. Class 15 Fellows will join the AALP program in Ottawa as usual, and for the first time our group will be meeting jointly with the Wedgeworth Leadership Institute (Florida) in Washington, DC. Some of our alumni will welcome visitors from Kentucky, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Ireland, Scotland and Wales this summer. And for the first time ever, a LEADNY class will build network connections to the African continent – what promises to be a life-changing experience. Transitions indeed!

Class 15 LEAD Fellows	Employment
Steven Ammerman	Manager of Public Affairs, New York Farm Bureau
Brenda Avedisian	Business Analyst, Cargill Animal Nutrition, Inc.
Bradley Bliss	Branch Manager, Lamb & Webster, Inc.
Robert Cross	Associate Professor, Morrisville State College
Patience Frysinger	Asst. General Manager, Empire Livestock, Dairylea Cooperative
Jessica Gaige	Asst. Director of Membership Marketing, New York Farm Bureau
Vaughn Gingerich	Crop Manager, Wayne County Farms, Inc.
Nathaniel Hartway	Finance & Environmental Assurance Coord., McCormick Farms, Inc.
Wade Heineman	North East & Canadian Sales, Oxbo International
Ryan Hrobuchak	Credit Representative, Farm Credit East, ACA
Kristopher Kane	General Manager & Winemaker, Old Chautauqua Vineyards
John Kast	Farm Operator, Kast Farms, Inc.
Darleen Krisher-Meehan	Owner, Country Crossroads Feed & Seed
Mary Beth La May	Farm Business Advisor, Farm Credit East, ACA
Judy Littrell	Executive Director, NY Association of Conservation Districts
Jenny Lundberg	Insurance Agent, Farm Family Insurance
Kenneth Marley	Extension Aide, Quality Milk Production Services - Genesee
Mark Modzeleski	Financial Planner, The Voss Group, LLC
Paul Molesky	Herd Manager, Allenwaite Farms, Inc.
Justin Mortensen	Credit Representative, Farm Credit East, ACA
Corey Mosher	Partner/Manager, Mosher Farms, LLC
Deb Ritchie	Owner/Operating Manager, Native Offerings Farm, LLC
Kristina Sidor	The Suah Center
Chelsea Smith	Business Representative, BASF Corporation
Amie Thomas	Director, Sales and Marketing, Dairy Marketing Services
Daniel Welch	Business and Succession Planning Coord., NYFarmNet/FarmLink
Christopher Whipple	Kirby's Farm Market
Tristan Zuber	Dairy Foods Processing Extension Specialist, CALS Harvest NY

## Reflections on Class 15 Year 1 (continued from front)

By Dan Welch, Class 15, NY FarmNet/Farm Link

In our tour of one of the new yogurt plants in Batavia, we were able to see how a multi-national company approaches product development and manufacturing for national distribution. At Baldor Foods in the Bronx, their focus was on distributing fresh foods rapidly throughout the Northeast. On our tour of Long Island, we saw small-scale processing in action at the SUNY Stony Brook Calverton Business Incubator. At this facility food processing start-ups are able to utilize shared use facilities and equipment to grow their business. The diversity in scale and markets served by these businesses reinforced for me the necessity of having farms of varying size and focus that can provide the raw ingredients required by the processors.

Learning about leadership took many forms during this year. There

were several formal workshops on communication skills, debate, public policy, and meeting management. One of the unique aspects of LEAD is the opportunity to observe leaders in action. On each of our tours, we were able to take something away from the leadership styles exhibited in the organizations we visited. The class was able to spend several hours with a state legislator at our Albany session, and discuss as a class the differences in leadership styles of the legislators we met with. At several of the sessions the class heard insightful presentations from LEAD alumni and other agricultural leaders before dinner or at breakfast. In Cortland, we met in small groups with local leaders from government, education, and the non-profit sectors. Three fundamentals of leadership kept coming up during the year: relationships, communication, and a

servant leadership philosophy.

Class 15 ended the year with a brief ceremony to recognize the completion of Leadership Fundamentals or Year 1 of LEAD NY. The year was an incredible experience full of self-discovery, greater understanding of agriculture and food in New York State, and leadership development. On behalf of Class 15, I would like to thank all of the businesses and farms that hosted us, the many great speakers we had, the LEAD NY Board of Directors, and Larry Van De Valk and Sarah Basil. And Class 15 couldn't have had a successful year without the support of our families and friends, a special thanks to all of them. I am looking forward to the second year of LEAD and understanding more about national and international agriculture.

### Congratulations to LEAD NY Class 15 on a Terrific First Year!





## News You Can Use

### Alumni News, Opportunities & Events

#### Addressing Growth Barriers in NYS Agriculture

*Dave Fisher* (class 6) of Mapleview Dairy in Madrid, NY will represent the dairy industry on Governor Andrew Cuomo's Strategic Interagency Task Force on Lessening Obstacles to Agriculture (SILO). Along with seven other task force members, Dave will work to ensure that State agencies that deal with farmers are communicating regularly, interacting efficiently, and lessening regulations on farms.

#### Oustanding Volunteers Receive Recognition

*Mary Stephens* (class 11), employee of APHIS Veterinary Services, was honored with a President's Call to Service Award for her extraordinary volunteer efforts. Stephens has served as a 4-H leader for 11 years, served on the Sheep and Wool Growers Association board of directors since 2003, and volunteered as a reader for Agriculture in the Classroom for the past 10 years.

*Darleen Kirsher-Meehan* (Class 15) and her husband were recognized for their volunteer work in January at the All Breeds Conference in Corning, NY. Congratulations Mary and Darleen for your outstanding volunteer work!

#### Promoting New York Farm Products

*Diane Whitten* (class 13), board member of the NY Small Scale Food Processors Association (NYSSFPA) presented at the NY Assembly Committee on Agriculture's Public Hearing on Promoting New York Farm Products. Whitten spoke on behalf of the NYSSFPA about which programs and efforts of the Pride of NY program and Taste NY program benefit members of the NYSSFPA. Assembly members McGee and Jafee were present at the hearing.

#### Call for 2015 Eisenhower Fellows Program Applicants

The U.S.-based Eisenhower Fellowships program is seeking applications for the

2015 Agriculture program. The fellowship provides an opportunity for intensive international travel and continued education. For further information and application materials visit : [www.efworld.org/our-programs/usa/recruitment](http://www.efworld.org/our-programs/usa/recruitment). The application deadline is June 13, 2014.

#### The NYS Agricultural Society Seeking Century & Bicentennial Farms

The NYS Agriculture Society is seeking farms in Western, NY that have been in continuous operation on the same land by the same family for 100 years or more and 200 years and more. Successful applicants will be recognized at the 2015 annual meeting. For further information visit: [www.nysagsociety.org](http://www.nysagsociety.org). Applications are due September 1, 2015.

## Spotlight on: Joe Gergela, Executive Director, Long Island Farm Bureau

*Editor's Note: Normally, we reserve this section of our newsletter for an "alumni spotlight"; a feature about one of our program alumni. Though Joe is not a LEADNY alumnus, he is certainly a long-time supporter of our program. He served on the LEAD New York Board of Directors from 1996 to 2002 and has been a regular speaker to our classes for as long as we can remember. Given his dedication to our program and his impending retirement from the LIFB, we wanted to recognize him here.*



**A**fter 26 years of service to the Long Island Farm Bureau (LIFB), Executive Director Joe Gergela is retiring this year. A passionate advocate for agriculture and the farmers he represents,

he will be missed by many who credit him with leading many successful initiatives over the past two decades.

Born in Greenport, Joe farmed with his family in Jamesport for the early part of his life. Like many other farm families, hard times in the 1980s forced him out of the family business, but securing the position of LIFB Executive Director allowed him to keep working in the industry that he loved. Like many other farm bureau leaders, his earliest involvement with the organization came through their young farmer program. He soon became a state representative on

the national young farmer committee, and that experience - together with some part time work experience with the US Department of Agriculture - helped him secure the LIFB leadership position in 1988.



During his tenure as executive director, Joe was very influential on issues ranging from pesticide use to farmland preservation to crafting farm-friendly legislation. Of the 30,000 acres of farmland remaining on the east end of Long Island, roughly one-third of that is permanently protected from development, thanks in large part to the efforts of Gergela. Even his adversaries credit him with much success, even if it meant losing his temper occasionally. Joe prefers to think of it as his passion coming through - passion for agriculture and the farmers that he serves.

For LEAD New York, in addition to serving on our board of directors, Joe has been a regular speaker during each class' visit to the east end of Long Island. He regularly spoke about farmland preservation and other Long Island agricultural issues because as he says, what happens in Long Island agriculture often serves as a harbinger of what is to come in other parts of the state and country. Purchase of Development Rights (or PDR programs) is a good case in point; they started on Long Island but are now a common farmland protection strategy throughout the state.

Joe has been coping with Type I diabetes for most of his life, and also has a new grandchild in Florida. He plans to focus on his health and his family as he begins this new chapter in his life. His LEAD New York family wishes him all the best moving forward.

LEAD NY thanks the following individuals and businesses who have invested in the future leadership of our industry and communities:

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*Saratoga Sod Farms/Laurie Griffen*

**\$1,000 - 2,499:**

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The names listed represent donations received from July 1, 2013 through May 1, 2014.

If you have made a donation since then or we have inadvertently omitted your name, please accept our apologies.



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We also wish to express our gratitude to all our *speakers, session facilitators, and tour hosts*, too numerous to mention here for their donation of time and talent to our program.

**Cultivating LEADership**

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