Thoughts on Kenya

The Kenya study trip – the culmination of our two years in the program. Reflecting back on the experience there are so many thoughts running through my head. I’ll do my best to share a few of them here.

The LEAD NY board chose Kenya for several reasons. Africa represents a huge market opportunity. Its economy is rapidly growing with a middle class bigger than India’s. By 2020 half of all households will have discretionary spending power, and the continent needs infrastructure, education, health care, and consumer goods. Africa is projected to have the world’s largest workforce by 2050, accounting for 25% of the world’s workforce at that point. With a rapidly growing population and more people moving to cities, there is concern over how agriculture will be able to keep up to feed all these people. Africa is rich in natural resources – not just oil, gas, and diamonds – but it also contains 60% of the world’s uncultivated arable farmland. Kenya itself is a country that is more politically stable than some of the others and has a variety of agriculture that made it a worthy place for the class to visit.

“Learning begins at the end of your comfort zone.” This is a quote I saw shortly after returning from the trip and I thought to myself how appropriate it was. It was clear before we departed on the plane out of JFK that many in the class felt out of their comfort zones and understandably so. Some of the class had never travelled outside of the U.S. before. Leading up to the trip, class members were torn between feelings of trepidation and excitement. Here we were about to embark on a trip to a country with a much different culture and environment. It was a chance to see a completely different way of life, different types of agriculture, and the challenges and opportunities they present.

We spent the first 4 days in Nairobi and its immediate surroundings. The capital is a large, modern city with approximately 3.5 million residents. It was immediately noticeable to us the contrasts of a growing city within a relatively young country (Kenya declared independence from Great Britain in 1963). Almost everyone had cell phones and used them to pay for things.
New Class, Alumni Travel Opportunity, and More! Lots of updates to share with you...

Normally I like to pick a topic and run with it in these Perspectives articles, but this issue I have lots of smaller updates I’d like to share with you…

WELCOME CLASS 18:
I’d like to thank you all for your help with our recent recruitment efforts. We had a very strong applicant pool for class 18, and the selection committee had some very difficult decisions to make (a good problem to have) in arriving at our final cohort. Please join me in congratulating and welcoming our newest members. They are about to embark on a life-changing experience – wish them well on their journey!

ALUMNI TRIP TO CUBA:
In previous newsletters, I have written about the importance of lifelong learning, challenging alumni to keep exercising their “mental muscles” through a variety of professional development opportunities. Study travel is one of those opportunities. We held our first alumni study tour to Ireland in July 2017, and it was a great success. Via an alumni survey about study travel a couple of years ago, we learned that the winter months were better for most of you to travel, and we also learned that Cuba was a desirable destination. We listened, and are pleased to announce that we will be offering an Alumni Study Tour to Cuba in January 2020! See the back panel for more information. We hope you will join us!

EXTERNAL REVIEW UPDATE:
Last spring, many of you participated in our external review process. I wanted to assure you that we haven’t ignored all of the valuable feedback we received through that process, and we are working diligently towards implementing several of the recommendations that came from that review. In fact, the LEAD Board is currently engaged in a comprehensive strategic plan revision (one of the recommendations from the review), and hope to have that finished this fall. Too, our curriculum committee will be meeting this month to discuss potential curriculum revisions for class 18. We don’t have the space to go into all of the details in this issue (and our work isn’t complete yet), but stay tuned and we’ll provide further updates this fall!
LEADNY thanks

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Donors in BOLD have established endowment accounts for LEADNY. Donors in italics are LEAD alumni.

PLEASE NOTE: The roster provides all donations received for Class 17. The donation period represented is July 1, 2017 through May 7, 2019. If you have made a donation since this issue went to print, or we have inadvertently omitted your name, please accept our apologies.

Donors in italics are LEAD alumni.
Thoughts on Kenya

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electronically, yet basic necessities such as safe drinking water weren’t readily available to everyone. There was little infrastructure in place for sewer systems or roads outside of the city. The entire country was progressive enough to ban single use plastic bags, but there is a lack of concerted effort to take care of the rest of the trash. We often saw people burning garbage on the side of the road. Rules of the road were much different than what we are accustomed to in the U.S. Road signs were often non-existent, drivers made their own lanes – whether on the shoulders or further off-road – and passing other vehicles was a regular occurrence despite it not always appearing safe to do so. Amazingly, all this happened without road rage or many accidents. In fact, drivers seemed courteous and usually beeped their horns in a friendly manner as they passed others.

The roads are extremely congested in and around Nairobi, which impacts how agricultural products are transported from the fields to the consumers. Often in areas where traffic moved slowly, vendors would set up on the side of the road selling their produce or even stand between lanes of traffic offering their wares. We also witnessed several people transporting their goods on motorcycles, with donkeys, and herding their cattle, sheep and goats right through traffic into the city to take them to market.

Most farmers in Kenya are known as smallholder farmers. They farm on small plots of land growing subsistence crops for their own use and then often another crop they can sell, usually only relying on family labor and little, if any, equipment. The average farm size is 2.5 hectares (6 acres) and about 80% of Kenyans derive their livelihoods from farming – quite a contrast to the U.S. where less than 2% do. The average income is only about $1,500/yr. At the same time there is 40% unemployment in the country. This means that most people can’t afford to buy much produce.

We visited a smallholder farmer who had recently invested in a solar powered water system that allowed him to irrigate his crops and also provide running water for his family’s house. Here was an example of investing in technology to improve their crops and livelihood for a family that previously didn’t have electricity. With the rural nature of most of the country and lack of infrastructure, these are common challenges Kenyans face, but they also represent the opportunities that exist to improve their quality of life.

Other innovative technologies we learned about were the use of geothermal energy and carbon dioxide to increase the productivity of greenhouses. Kenya is one of the largest flower exporters in the world, particularly roses. Most of the roses are exported to Europe and we were fortunate enough to visit Oserian Flower Farm on February 7th – one week until Valentine’s Day and their last day to ship roses to Europe. The Lake Naivasha region has a large natural resource of geothermal activity. That combined with the proximity to the lake for irrigation has attracted several greenhouse operations to the area. This has both benefits and drawbacks. The industry provides jobs for thousands of people where there are few other employment opportunities. At the same time there is controversy over whether the greenhouses are polluting the lake with runoff from fertilizer and reducing the lake level by using the water for irrigation. This impacts one of the other key industries in the area – fishing – and often pits the two against each other.

Several of the businesses we visited spoke about their relationships with their employees. Many preferred to employ more people rather than investing in technology because so many people are in need of jobs. While this is partially profit driven, the businesses did recognize that employing more people would have overall benefits for those communities. A good example of this was at Brown’s Cheese, a 4th generation business that employs 150 people and uses no automation. If they operated in the U.S., they would only employ about 20 people. A large part of this was due to the low wage environment. Starting employees were paid about $7/day. Other businesses we visited paid similar amounts – between $5-10/day.

One of the challenges that Brown’s Cheese faces is unpredictable electricity, often having to rely on generators, but stated that the infrastructure is rapidly improving. The improving infrastructure allows them to get their products to Nairobi quicker, but also puts pressure on converting agricultural land into housing. Brown’s is considering moving their operation due to the high cost...
of land in the immediate vicinity, which made it cost prohibitive to expand at the current location. Weighing on their minds was the impact a move would have on their current employees.

There is a growing trend in the consumption of dairy products, but the lack of refrigeration throughout the country (another challenge) is shifting the production from fresh milk to longer shelf life products like cheese, butter, and fermented milk (Mala). The popularity of pizza and cheeseburgers has helped the growth of cheese consumption. That being said, cheese protein is still more expensive than meat protein for most Kenyans. Most growth in dairy products has been spurred by a growing upper class.

We also had the chance to interact with and experience different levels of education within Kenya. One of the more inspiring places was the Children’s Science Center in Nairobi. The premise behind the center is to teach STEM classes through interactive experiences. “Hands on, minds on” and “Excellence is a habit” were two of their themes. The 11 & 12 year old students we met with were from Kibera, the largest urban slum in Africa, and had been hand selected to attend classes at the Children’s Science Center. It was impressive to hear their aspirations to become mathematicians, neuroscientists, and biologists. I only hope they will be able to pursue their dreams as they get older. I came away from the experience thinking that the U.S. education needs to step up its game, as our future leaders will be (or already are) falling behind other parts of the world.

And, oh yes, we did have a lot of fun in Kenya too. If you ever have the chance to take a safari, do it! The wildlife is amazing and abundant. The people of Kenya are some of the most hospitable and generous I’ve ever met.

Trying to sum this experience up into a few words is impossible. I would say the trip did put a lot into perspective. Many of us in the class commented on how fortunate we are to have been born in the U.S. This luck of the draw gives us so many more opportunities in life. The challenge will be, what will we do with this opportunity and the knowledge that we have gained through this LEAD experience to make a difference in agriculture? Knowing my classmates, I would say great things are to come!
Mark Masler (Class 3)
LEAD an Important Catalyst in Run for NYS Supreme Court Justice

My experience as a member of LEAD Class III was Life-Changing. When I started LEAD, I was a young dairy farmer working with my wife and her parents in Cortland County. I was also very involved with the Farm Bureau Young Farmer and Rancher program and was immersed in Agricultural Policy issues and advocacy. I had wanted to be a farmer since I was a young child and indeed it was very fulfilling – growing abundant crops, growing the herd’s milk production through better nutrition and husbandry, and growing relationships with others interested in agriculture. Seven wonderful years!

But the many great experiences I had in LEAD opened my mind to new possibilities. I was surrounded by an amazing class of vibrant individuals with a diversity of professions and skills that was led by our Director, Brian O. Earle. We learned so much from each other and challenged ourselves to tackle more than we had previously thought possible. And the best part is that we became fast friends who to this day can have a conversation that flows as if we had been together just last week. We also saw the scope of agriculture and the food system with its many challenges and opportunities. My LEAD experiences built upon my Farm Bureau background and opened my eyes to the possibility of a career change, so I took a deep breath and applied to law school. I began attending Cornell Law School in the Fall of 1990 during the second year of the LEAD program (that was a busy year!). I found law school to be exhilarating and, for the first time in my life, truly enjoyed being a student. After graduation, I practiced law with the Ithaca Office of Harris Beach in Tompkins County, where I worked for 15 years. I especially enjoyed the opportunity to use my farm background and legal education to help farm families and other business owners with issues important to their success.

In 2008, I was presented with the opportunity for another change when New York State Supreme Court Justice Phillip R. Rumsey, seated in Cortland County, contacted me and asked if I would consider working with him. It was not an easy decision to leave the busy law practice that I had spent years building, but I was attracted by the opportunity to work with a respected Justice and to do the intellectually challenging work of the Supreme Court. I have served as his Attorney and Principal Law Clerk for nearly 11 years, including two years at the Appellate Division. Supreme Court is a trial-level Court that hears the most significant civil cases and is unique among all New York courts due to the tremendously broad range of subjects that it considers, including contracts, zoning and land use, all types of accidents, medical malpractice, real property, divorces and mortgage foreclosures. It is crucial for all residents of our State that we have Justices who understand and appreciate our communities and especially the importance of agriculture as our number one industry.

Now, here comes another change! Justice Rumsey must retire at the end of the year and I am a candidate to succeed him running on the Republican, Conservative and Independence Party lines in the ten-county 6th Judicial District, which includes Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Madison, Otsego, Schuyler, Tioga and Tompkins Counties. Since 2008 I have found that my true calling in the law is working in the judiciary and as a lifelong resident of the 6th Judicial District, it would be the honor of my professional career to bring my agricultural background to the bench and to serve our community as the next Supreme Court Justice.

Assisting Justice Rumsey with all aspects of the work of the Court has been the best preparation to succeed him and has also taught me that being a Justice requires more than just an understanding of the law -- it also requires an understanding of the people who appear before the court and a deep respect for the fact that decisions of the court have a direct and lasting impact on their lives. I have found that the variety of experiences I have had – from working as a dairy farmer, private practice attorney and in Supreme Court through my involvement in community organizations, like LEAD, Farm Bureau, Cooperative Extension, Little League, and the YMCA -- help me to understand people from all walks of life and to find practical solutions for legal disputes.

I am thankful for the opportunities afforded me and look forward to serving our community as Supreme Court Justice during the next decade. Thanks to my LEAD classmates and the LEAD program for the encouragement to strive for satisfying and fulfilling work and life experiences. I appreciate, more than ever, the fellowship, networking, and leadership skills that I gained from this opportunity. What an impact the LEAD program has had on those who participated in the program and our industry -- over thirty years of success since 1985!
Griffen is LEAD’s 8th Outstanding Alumni Award Recipient

Laurie Griffen (class 5), co-owner of Saratoga Sod Farm, is the 8th recipient of LEAD New York’s prestigious Outstanding Alumni Award (OAA). Awardees are selected based on their leadership, service and impact on behalf of their communities and the industry organizations that they serve. Laurie was recognized at the Class 17 Fellows Commencement Ceremony in Ithaca on April 12. Congratulations Laurie on this well-deserved honor!

NEWS YOU CAN USE

ALUMNI NEWS, OPPORTUNITIES & EVENTS

Please support Class 18!

Thanks to a flush of some very generous contributions at the 11th hour, we were able to meet our fundraising goal for the class 17 cycle – thank you to all of our investors. (See the donor roster in this issue.) Remember, however, that we “wipe the roster clean” at the start of each new class cycle (July 1). So, if you would like to be recognized as a class 18 investor, please renew your support. A solicitation mailing will be sent later this summer. Thank you!

Thompson speaks at CoBank event

CoBank associates from all of their locations were able to participate in the International Women’s Day (IWD) Associate Resource Group event with spotlight speaker, Natasha Thompson, LEAD NY Class 17 alum, on March 8th as she discussed “The Power of Stories” and its purpose in leadership. She encouraged each attendee to know what their personal and organizational story is and how that fits into decisions throughout their career. One of Natasha’s key points was how the stories we tell ourselves can either limit or catapult us to the next level in our career.

4-H Foundation Golf Tournament

This year is the 31st Anniversary of the 4-H Foundation Golf Tournament. 2018 was the most successful year yet, with the money raised to support Career Explorations, held at Cornell, a brand new “Communications Institute” that builds on public presentations that 4-Her’s know so well, along with other projects across the state. The event this year is on May 31st at the Ithaca Country Club in Ithaca, NY. The event has raised over half a million dollars for 4-H programming in New York since its conception! This year, we are again offering online registration and payment at: www.nys4hfoundation.org/golf. We also have an online signup for volunteers available at: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/70A044B5AF29A1FB6-4hgolf.

Connect with us on LinkedIn

Another way to stay in touch with the program and keep abreast of current program news (like updates on the alumni study trip offering) is to follow us on LinkedIn. Connect to the LEAD New York Program page at: https://www.linkedin.com/in/leadnewyork/. If you are an alumnus, ask to join the LEADNY Alumni Group at: https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4362506/.

Northeast SARE SEeks APPLICATIONS to lead Professional Development Program

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program is seeking applications to lead its Professional Development Program (PDP). The Coordinator of the program serves as part of Northeast SARE’s leadership team and manages the region’s PDP competitive grant program as well as state SARE programs offered at every Land Grant institution.

Applications are welcome from individuals located within the Northeast region who have interest in facilitating adult education efforts and have commitment from their institution or organization to house the PDP. Applications are due by May 31, 2019; the PDP contract is available in late summer 2019.

For more information, please see northeastsare.org/LeadPDP. If you have any questions about this job opportunity, please contact Vern Grubinger at vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu.

If you have news to share...

Please send news to ljv4@cornell.edu. 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.
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.