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2017 Winter Traveling Dairy Tour Summary

This year's New England Winter Traveling Dairy course took place from January 9th to the 13th. Thirty-one students and faculty from four New England Land Grant Institutions: University of Massachusetts, University of New Hampshire, University of Maine, and University of Connecticut) participated in the trip. Participants gathered at the University of Connecticut where UConn students hosted a tour through the 100 cow dairy (Holstein and Jersey). Current production data is running just over 28,000 / 3.7 / 3.0 and 18,447 / 5.1 / 3.6 for the Holstein and Jersey herd respectively. This spring UConn will be updating their facility with the addition of two robotic milkers. After the farm tour and lunch, kindly provided by the UConn Dept. of Animal Sciences, we boarded the bus for the six hour ride to Pennsylvania where we spent the rest of the tour. A generous Farm Credit AgEnhancement grant provided funding for the charter bus that makes this annual event possible.

Our first stop was in Gettysburg where we had a tour of the famous battlefield. Although we did run into a bit of snow and cold weather, we all learned a lot about the three day event that changed the course of United States history.

After the tour of the battlefield we headed to Mason Dixon Farm also located in Gettysburg. Here we were given a tour by Lucas Waybright, part of the ninth generation of the Waybright family. The Mason Dixon Farm milks 2,400 Holsteins. Just under half of these cows are milked robotically while the balance is milked in a double 24 parlor. Milking three times a day the farm produces 3 tanker loads of milk every 24 hours. Since the farm is located on the border of Pennsylvania and Maryland (hence the name Mason-Dixon Farm), 80% of their crop land is in Maryland. We learned this causes some challenges because of differing agricultural laws restricting crop practices between the two states. In addition to the robotic milkers, other innovations at Mason Dixon include a covered bunk silo, methane digestors, and a covered manure lagoon. The cover on the lagoon consists of a floating membrane which allows the farm to pump precipitation off the top of the lagoon (thus saving costs associated with spreading) and at the same time allows for the capture of residual methane emitted from the manure effluent underneath.

We then traveled to State College, PA. Our first stop was at Hameau Farm in Belleville. This third-generation small Ayrshire Dairy is currently milking 24 head and operating an intensive grazing operation. The herd has a rolling herd average of 13,700 pounds with 4.2% fat and 3.3% protein. Gay Rogers, owner of the farm, gave us the tour. During the summers Gay runs a summer camp for girls ages 8-14 on her farm. Many of the girls who attend the camp come from cities and suburban areas. This camp teaches them about life on the dairy farm. Interestingly, one of our students from UMass, Amye Gulezian, was introduced to the farm, first as a camper, then as a counselor. Amye continues to help out on the farm during vacations and summers. Hameau dairy has an impressive herd which they also show. None of Gay's cows have under an 85 classification and she is currently working on getting a raw milk license.

After our tour at Hameau, we then headed to Williamsburg, PA where we toured Penn England Farm. Currently Penn England is milking about 2,000 cows at three different locations. The rolling herd average is an impressive 26,000 pounds with 4.0% fat and 3.25% protein. They have a mainly Holstein herd, with a few Jerseys. They also operate a methane digester that generates an average of 108kW/day. The manure solids are separated and used as bedding. Penn England runs an interesting breeding program that is heavy into genomic testing and about 60% embryo transfer.

After Penn England, we went to the Kulp Family farm in Martinsburg. The Kulp Farm milks about 2,900 Holsteins between the main farm and a satellite farm. They average at about 90 pounds of milk per cow although summer heat stress knocks this number down significantly. The farm solely uses AI and each year they sell about two to three hundred heifers. The entire Kulp Family gave us a tour of all the ins and outs of the farm, provided us with a delicious lunch, and the opportunity to swing on their monster swing! Both Penn England and the Kulp Family farm sell their milk to Land-o-Lakes. The Kulp Farm also has developed a unique specialty value-added Kosher market. The availability of crop land to either rent or buy was a major concern in this region.

The last farm visited on the 11th was Vale Wood Farms in Loretto. Here Carissa Westrick provided us with a tour of both their farm (milking about 200 cows; 26,000 RHA with 3.8% fat and 3.2% protein) and their processing plant where they process all their own milk. As the smallest producer/processor in PA, they bottle fluid milk and make dairy products including; cottage cheese, yogurt, and ice cream. Vale Wood delivers to wholesale accounts as well as schools and private homes within an hour's radius of the plant. Carissa pointed out that there are many things to be considered when running a dairy business. For her business, snow-days require on-the-fly juggling of routes as well as product demand. Summers are particularly challenging with cessation of primary and secondary school consumption. Most of the students on "The Tour" were associated with a production background. This stop allowed for an appreciation of the "balancing" challenges faced by a small processor that markets all their own products.

The next day we headed to another part of dairy production that is often overlooked, Cargill Processing plant in Wylausing, PA. Many people don't realize that cull dairy cows supply about 25-30% of the beef market here in the US. Cargill employs over 1,000 workers and processes approximately 1,500 head of cattle a day, the majority are cull dairy cows primarily from the eastern half of the US. Cargill supplies major retail companies such as Wegmans, Target, Walmart and many restaurant chains including Outback with many of their products. We were able to tour the entire facility from the kill floor to the processing room where the meat is packaged and shipped.

The last farm visited on Thursday afternoon was Gorrell Dairy in Milan. The Gorrell Farm is an 828 head milking herd (72lbs/cow, 4.1% fat, 3.3% protein) that sells to Land-O-Lakes. As a first generation farm the Gorrell's moved to their location with a 64 cow Holstein herd in 1989. By 2000 the Gorrell's bought their last animal and have had a closed herd for the past 17 years. Their daughter, Jessica Slaymaker, and her husband have started a dairy, but due to a mechanical problem with our bus, we unfortunately were unable to tour their farm. The Gorrell family generously invited all thirty-one of us in their home, ordered pizza for our dinner and kept us warm until another bus came to bring us back to the hotel. A large thank you from everyone on the Winter Traveling Dairy trip is extended to the Gorrell family for their incredible kindness and hospitality during our extended visit!

On Friday morning, we visited Penn State's dairy facilities. Penn State's dairy farm is very involved with ongoing research. Their facilities include a free stall barn for the milking herd, a 60 cow tie stall barn, and an intensive research tie stall barn which houses 16 cows. One research project that we learned about was looking at alternative feed sources other than corn that effect the methane output of cows. This kind of research is important in today's world where new solutions for environmental issues are being sought every day. Success in this project could ease some of the pressure placed by environmental groups on the dairy industry. Major renovations/expansion plans are in the works at PSU Dairy Facilities. We look forward to seeing the renovations on a future Winter Traveling Dairy Tour.

Thank you to Farm Credit AgEnhancement Program for the grant that made this and other previous trips possible. We would also like to thank the all generous people associated with all of the farms who took time out of their day to give us tours and expand our knowledge of the dairy industry. Your knowledge and interest in wanting us to learn made for an unforgettable trip. Both the students and faculty are excited and ready to see where this trip takes us next year!