Every January students from Universities across New England spend a week traveling to various farms and businesses related to the dairy industry. This year marked the fifteenth annual travel course. Students from the University of New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut and Vermont Technical College traveled through the state of Vermont. Special guests from South Dakota State University also accompanied the New England students through their journeys. This trip was made possible in part through a grant from the Northeast Farm Credit’s AgEnhancement Program.

On Monday January 2nd the group met in White River Junction, boarded a bus, and ventured to Woodstock, where they toured the historic Billings Farm and Museum. Farm manager Jason Johnson welcomed the students and give a tour of the farm’s 65-registered Jerseys, draft horses, oxen, and Southdown sheep. The Jersey cows were quite impressive with their lactation records, including one beauty that was in her 15th lactation. Their barn was suited with excellent ventilation and biosecurity measures for the many visitors that tour the farm annually. This farm does an excellent job of showing the public what a working, dairy farm looks like with daily milking demonstrations in their 30 cow tie stall barn. The beautiful views of the surrounding town from the farm make this a picturesque location for a farm museum.

From there the group traveled to Randolph to visit Vermont Technical College. Dr Chris Dutton and VTC students hosted our group for tours of their 80 cow freestall facility and a delicious cookout. We then traveled to Williston and checked into our hotel.

On Tuesday morning we visited Paul-lin Dairy in East Fairfield, which provided another look at a small Jersey herd in the state of Vermont. The 30-cow herd was inside their tie stall barn at the time we visited, but is typically out grazing in the warmer months. This conventional dairy purchased all of their feed and component fed hay and grain. The cows, heifers and calves were very well cared for and maintained. The small family operation was rewarding to see, and served as a reminder that small dairy farms are still around and profitable.

Fournier Farm is an exemplary organic farm. When they went organic the managers improved their practices and raised healthier, stronger calves that grew into excellent heifers and cows. The inability to use antibiotics did not affect this herd, because they began to improve the care of their calves and cows in such a way that antibiotics would not be necessary. Milking about 80 cows, the Fournier’s goal is to provide the herd with the most natural environment possible. The calves were fed milk three times a day, and weaned at approximately four months. This practice resulted in healthy, strong calves. The farms somatic cell count measured fewer than 100,000 cells. This farm painted students a picture of organized, successful management practices.

Gervais farm milked 950 Holsteins on their large and impressive farm. The weather was frigid, but that didn’t stop us from touring their large calf facility that housed four automatic calf feeders. Aside from milk, the farm acquired additional income by selling power back to the grid from their methane digester. The dried solid waste from the digester was used as bedding, with no noticeable increase in somatic cell count. One of the
first larger dairies visited on this travel course showed us how to manage a larger herd while still being sustainable.

Four Girl's Farm, owned by Peter and Madonne Rainville family housed 60 cows and a Lely robotic milking machine. After a tragic fire, the family lost half of their herd, and was forced to rebuild. After a year off of traveling to decide how to best rebuild their farm they determined that installing a robot would be the best way to go in order for them to spend more time with their family. For many students this was the first time they had seen a robot in action. The machine collected a plethora of information about each individual cow. Their cows were milked an average 2.7 times a day. The cows entered the robotic milker on their own free will and received a measured amount of a custom grain mix each time they were milked. This hard working, personable family depicted the perfect image of how to have a successful farm, business and family.

On Wednesday, we travelled down to Washington County (Cabot, VT) and toured Cabot Cooperative Cheese Making facility as well as their new state of the art cut and wrap facility, in green hairnets and all! After viewing a short video giving the history of Cabot Cooperative, Mr. Doug Dimento and his staff toured us through the facility. Our entire group took full advantage of the table of free samples!

Our next stop was at Lylehaven Holsteins located in East Montpelier, VT, which is home to some award winning Holstein genetics. Susan Brown, the manager of Lylehaven, toured us through the farm. The farm has a neat state of the art conveyor feeding system where all feed components are weighed out and conveyed into the mixer, which is then conveyed outside to the exercise yard and into the feed bunk. There is no need for a tractor for any mixing or feeding out. Much of Lylehaven's business depends on the genetics of their herd. There were several large embryo flush cows and the farm was also doing some in vitro fertilization work as well.

Fairmont Farms in East Montpelier, VT was our next stop on the trip, where they were milking around 1,000 Holstein cows between two separate farms. We visited the main farm and were toured throughout the facility by Tucker Purchase where about 700 of their cows were housed. Fairmont also built a new group housing, ad-libitum acidified milk replacer, calf barn within the last couple of months. They were bedding the calf barn with straw and had developed a state of the art ventilation system to ensure proper airflow through the entire barn. We viewed Fairmont’s dry cow barn, which also housed their calving pens, where they have warming pens for newborn calves before they are transported up to the calf barn. This was the first farm that we visited where we were introduced to a younger generation of management, which was encouraging to us as dairy students!

Our last stop of the day was to Riverside Farms, LLC in Richmond, VT. The Conant Family was milking around 400 Holstein cows in a trigon parlor, which was something few of our students had seen before. As a group, we were very impressed with the Conant Family and their methods of management of their farm. They were committed to the well-being of their family first and foremost, which is why the expansion of their dairy farm was not a current plan on the table. The Conant Family was also growing other areas of their farm including farmers’ markets, vegetable stands, and other forms of other income apart from the dairy. The Conant Family was all about educating students and offered summer internship opportunities to any students looking for on-farm experience!
Our first stop on Thursday morning was to Monument Farms in Weybridge, VT where they milk 600 Holsteins cows and bottle and market their own milk. We toured the bottling plant first, where our group was educated on the history of the family and how they began in the milk marketing and bottling business. The facility was small, but functional for the output that Monument Farms Dairy was providing. We toured the actual dairy farm next, where all of the milk from 600 cows went directly to the bottling plant. The farm recently put in a new methane digester and was using the pressed solids as bedding across the farm, except in the calf barn. They were having issues with the efficiency of the digester because it was not running at full capacity. This was a neat stop because everything was happening right there, the cows, the milking, the bottling, and the marketing.

Our next stop was to Blue Spruce Farm in Bridport, VT operated by the Audet family. Marie Audet was our farm tour guide. They were currently milking 1300 Holstein cows and were home to two methane digesters. We got a tour of one of the milking barns, the calf barn, and the two methane digesters. We were impressed with the calf barn and how it was set up with individual hutches. The farm also used the pressed solids from the digester as bedding around the farm. Solids, over and above what was required for bedding were being composted and sold to local landscape contractors. It was really neat to be able to tour one of the biggest dairy farms in Vermont.

The last stop of the day was to Allendale Farm in Panton, VT where they were milking mostly Holsteins with a small herd of Jersey cattle for showing. They had just installed a brand new heat detection system that incorporated pedometers and rumen motility sensors that will improve their pregnancy rate. Joe and Rebecca Allen, were doing some IVF and embryo transfer work with their small herd of Jerseys. They ran an ad libitum acidified milk program in their calf barn and we got to see a calf warmer in action!

As we began our last day of the travel course we stopped to visit University of Vermont CREAM program in Burlington, VT. They milk 30 cows, 15 Holsteins and 15 Jerseys. The entire program is completely student run from the feeding, milking, and management decisions. The program runs by the calendar year, instead of by the school year, which means UVM CREAM students provide coverage and care through all school breaks and through the summer months. Not very many colleges in America offer this unique management program that gives the students hands-on learning.

Our very last stop on the tour was to the Vermont Farmstead Cheese Company in Woodstock. We had to travel some crazy back roads to get there, but the trip was worth it! The facility used to house and milk water buffalo. The cows were housed in a free stall environment on waterbeds. The milking parlor was a double 5-side opening. Cheese production was happening on site with all of the milk produced from the dairy going directly to the cheese production. A travel course alumnus was currently employed as the herd manager of the dairy, so it was really neat to see where these dairy students are ending up in the dairy industry.
Overall it was a great tour where students got to see a wide range and variety of farms involved in the Vermont and New England dairy industry. We are very indebted to all of the producers who graciously took time out of their busy day to host 40 something students and faculty on their farms, to Paul, Linda, and Claire Stanley, who were instrumental in coordinating our farm visits in Franklin County, and lastly to the AgEnhancement Program for making this trip possible. We are all looking forward to next year!