

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

**Reflection: 2016 Agriculture Weekend Experience (AWE)**

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As I reflect on the 2016 Agriculture Weekend Experience, held October 7-9, I could not have asked for a better opportunity, or people to work alongside, to plan an Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences event.

My goal was to have ten individuals take part in the experience, and I ended up with eleven students applying. However, due to certain circumstances, nine accompanied me on the trek to south-central Iowa. These nine were Allison Wallace, freshman in animal science, from Mundelein, IL; Ashley Schwartzhoff, freshman in agricultural studies, from Decorah, IA; Chloe Ryan, freshman in animal science, from Naperville, IL; Christina Lavery, sophomore in biology, from Peoria, IL; Colton Kreber, senior in agricultural business, from Waukee, IA; Heidi Hamilton, junior in agronomy, from Wilton, IA; Julianna Jespersen, junior in animal science, from Moline, IL; Kaylyn Hodge, senior in agronomy, from Covina, CA; and Gilbert Asasira, a visiting scholar working in the horticulture department who graduated from Makerere University in Uganda in 2016.

To begin the weekend, we met in the parking lot near Curtiss Hall and took off for The Huxley Learning Center located in Huxley, IA, for an interactive tour consisting of seed science, precision equipment and data science. The seed science section elaborated on how genetics, biotechnology traits and agronomics contribute to successful harvests. Precision equipment and data science highlighted the complexities of how farmers plant their crops and maximize the results of their decisions on the farm.

Afterwards, we made our first stop at Ron and Dona Veren's farm in State Center, IA. Once we finished our delicious beef stew supper, we toured their corn and soybean farm. In addition, the Verens had several restored tractors on display. Before the evening concluded, we stopped at the farm of Randy and Patti Hilleman of Clemons, IA, and the farm of Jeff and Christy Hibbs of Albion, IA. Four participants and I stayed at the Hibbs' home, while the other five were divided between the Verens and the Hillemans. Before turning in, we roasted marshmallows over a campfire and made s'mores.

On Saturday, October 8, we loaded up and went to Albion's Firemen Breakfast with Jeff, Christy and Hannah Hibbs, where we won several door prizes for attending. Once the whole group was picked up, we drove to Blood Dairy in State Center, IA, for a dairy cattle production tour. What a place! Kevin Blood lead the visit, and we saw newborn calves and the milking and feeding processes for his 3,000 head of dairy cattle.

Then we drove to Hilldale Pork, State Center, IA, for a tour of its hog production farm. From piglets to sows, we gathered information from their entire operation. Hilldale Pork provides the hot dogs sold at Iowa State's Jack Trice Stadium and Hilton Coliseum. After snapping a few photos, we traveled to The Market Off Main in Albion, IA. The Market Off Main has products from the Hibbs' farm, as well as local Iowa goods. Afterwards, we went to the Hibbs home for a tasty lunch consisting of hamburgers, baked beans and chocolate chip cookies. Before dropping the students off at their host family homes, Christy and Hannah Hibbs showed us their corn, soybean and beef cattle farm. To conclude the evening, I spent time with Kaylyn Hodge at Ron and Dona Veren's. We ate Bailey's Pizza for dinner and rode in the combine while Ron harvested soybeans.

Sunday, Oct. 9, was spent attending morning church service and snagging lunch before packing up to head back to Ames.

Upon conclusion of AWE, several post-event items were completed. I could not have asked for a better weekend spent with the selected individuals and host families. At the beginning, I found it challenging to find host families who were available to host students during harvest time, but with persistence I was able to find three wonderful families. I found it beneficial to make a checklist of what needed to be completed prior to the event, as well as items that needed to be addressed at the conclusion. If I had to be nitpicky about one element that I wish I had done better, I would have written a generic press release preceding the weekend. It proved to be difficult to write one quickly upon return to release to the participants' hometown newspapers.

I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to take the reins of planning the 2016 Agriculture Weekend Experience. The memories and friendships made will last a lifetime, and I am grateful for the experience. Agriculture receives quite a bit of stigma in the media, and it is our job as agriculturists to shine a positive light on the industry, as well as educating consumers. Through the 2016 Agriculture Weekend Experience, we are initiating those steps through our College of Agriculture and Life Sciences students.

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