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The LEAD Review

Director's Update

By Dr. Terry Hejny, Director
Nebraska LEAD Program



As I write this, my final column, many thoughts and emotions run through my mind. But first . . .

As winter slides into spring almost another year has passed, and our Nebraska LEAD Program has continued to offer an outstanding educational experience for established and emerging leaders in agriculture. We have many to thank for our longevity and success—the founders, board members, our many donors, previous directors and staff members, alumni, industry partners, campus coordinators and volunteers, higher education administrators, and their faculty and staff. Our goal and long-term philosophy continue to include: honesty and integrity, in providing the highest quality of innovative programming to our LEAD Fellows, in professionalism in working with others, and in the prudent management of our financial resources. I believe these core values have greatly contributed to our organization's success for the past 43 years.

As I look back on the past 17 years, I can't help but stand in awe of what we have collectively accomplished. Last month, the members of Nebraska LEAD Group 41 graduated and will be moving on to serve in leadership roles in agriculture and their communities. They will be continuing the 41-year tradition of applying their LEAD experiences to positively impact the lives of others. Like the 40 classes before them, they will make a difference. Congratulations, LEAD 41, and LEAD on!

Due to the weather-related cancellation of our April seminar, LEAD 42 will complete their first year in the Panhandle in August. They are another great group and I have enjoyed working with them.

We are recruiting candidates for Nebraska LEAD Class 43 and your assistance in identifying the future leaders for our industry is greatly appreciated. As always, the application deadline is June 15. Please send nominations, contact information, etc. to our office as soon as possible AND please assist us in getting them to the "finish line!" Your assistance in serving as a reference, answering questions, and pushing them to apply is appreciated.

My sincere appreciation to Shana and Irene for putting up with me! I have enjoyed working with you and will miss you! As for me, adventure is out there, and my wife, Pam, and I are looking forward to new experiences and opportunities.

In closing, I have been blessed to work with such fine people, and I thank you for allowing me the honor and privilege to serve as the director of the Nebraska LEAD Program. I'm not a fan of "good-byes," so when I was a kid, a long, long time ago Bob Hope would always close out his television shows with a song. Mind you, just because I can't sing, doesn't mean I won't sing . . . but I shall spare you the aggravation this time by simply saying, "Thanks for memories."

A Message From the Chair of the Board

Jolene Messinger



Spring has arrived and that means a season of new beginnings. As the Chairperson, I can tell you it has been a busy and productive season for our NALC Board. We have completed multiple research projects, reached out to potential Board members to replace those who have completed their terms and have slated a new Executive Team to replace our current one for the upcoming year. It is hard to believe that I am ending my term as an NALC Board Member, having already served two, three-year terms. A lot has happened during those six years, and it was an honor to be elected and to have served on the Executive Team for the past three years. I have enjoyed working with every Board Member, the LEAD office, including Shana Gerdes and Irene Malzer, and the UNL team. I am proud of the way we handled adversity and, if you can believe it, a global pandemic! I am confident that after I leave, this Board will continue to provide this Program with invaluable leadership. I want to also wish Dr. Terry Hejny, who was my LEAD Director when I was a Fellow in the Class of 33, all of my

heartfelt thanks for all that he has done to make this program the preeminent Agricultural Leadership Program. From my time as a Fellow, when I was reintroducing myself to the Agricultural Industry, to my term as Chairperson, the passion that Dr. Hejny has for this Program continues to be inspiring to me. I wish him the best on the next adventure that he partakes in, and am beyond thankful that the next Director will be left with a Program that is at the top of its game. We will miss you, Dr. Hejny! Congratulations to the newest graduates of the Program! We are excited to see what you do with everything you have learned. To our alumni, thank you for all you do to continue to push Nebraska and your communities forward. Never forget that without advocates like us, our voices will be silenced. As always, the more voices we can educate and provide leadership skills to the better. I look to you all to find potential Fellows, so that we can continue to have diverse, passionate agricultural advocates for years to come.

Thank You to Departing NALC Board Members

The Nebraska LEAD Program would like to thank **Suzanna Klaasmeyer** (LEAD 31), and **Jolene Messinger** (LEAD 33) for their dedication to our mission: To Prepare and Motivate Men and Women in Agriculture for More Effective Leadership, and for their years of service on the NALC Board. Suzanna stepped down last fall so that her brother, Nathan Watermeier, could accept a spot in LEAD class 42. Jolene will be completing her sixth year of service to our board on June 30. Without the volunteer service of individuals such as these, our Nebraska LEAD Program cannot position itself as the elite leadership development program for our industry, state, and nation.

With Terry

Shana Gerdes
Admin. Assoc.



In the fall of 2008, I began working at the Nebraska LEAD Program with Mr. Hejny. In the intervening 16 years, he earned the title Dr. Hejny. Though his title changed, I have always been working with Terry. Sometimes our work has been very collaborative, other times things were more "siloe" in nature. What has never changed has been Terry's bone-deep goodness and strength of character, and his determination and faith in our collective ability to move this program towards a bright future. His care and respect for me as a person and appreciation for the work I do for LEAD have been a gift. My son Ben wrote in his HS graduation thank you note to Terry that, "You must be a good boss because Mom never complains about you." Indeed. Terry's been a *great* boss and I am grateful to have worked with him. So, thank you, Terry. I will miss you.

What? He's Leaving?

Irene Malzer
Admin. Asst.



When the official announcement was made, that Terry was going to retire as the Director of The Nebraska LEAD Program, various thoughts ran through my mind. I just started; he can't leave! How will we survive without him? What will he do all day long without me cracking silly jokes that make him shake his head and roll his eyes at me??

The answer to all of the above is Terry is a LEADER. He has set us up for success. He has given us everything we need to continue without him. The LEAD Program had a firm foundation that succeeded before him. He took that and ran with it and made it even more successful.

I will miss him. His exuberance, his passion for this program, his way of making everyone he talked to feel important and what they had to say mattered!! Now, that is a skill! I will take what I learned from him over the last three years and be a better co-worker and office assistant.

Congratulations, LEAD 41!

March 15, 2024, the following Nebraska LEAD 41 Fellows received their program completion certificates:

Caleb Ayers, Dickens
Christopher Beerbohm, Scribner
Amanda Mae Berg, Albion
Jamie Bright, Kimball
Jakob P. Burke, Imperial
Karina Christensen, Arthur
Easton Eggers, Omaha

Makayla Fox, Kearney
Jon Lechtenberg, Imperial
Abby Lineweber, Beatrice
Rhett D. Montgomery, Kearney
Lance Pacht, Hebron
Joe Ruskamp, North Bend
Brian Schwartz, Norfolk

Anna Shadbolt, Gordon
Amber Shane, O'Neill
Allissa Troyer, Milford
Steve Vaughn, Brady
Tyler Wellman, Lincoln
Luke C. Zangger, North Loup



Thank You, Banquet Sponsors!

We extend our thanks to **AKRS Equipment, LEAD III, Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts, Pioneer/Corteva,** and **Reinke Manufacturing Co.** for their support of the Nebraska LEAD Program by underwriting a portion of the cost of the Annual Recognition Banquet.

Thank You, Banquet Table Sponsors!

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Crusty's Feed Store (2)
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Farmers National Company
Pam and Terry Hejny (LEAD XX) Family
J & S Feed Lot
Kamler Family Farms
LEAD Alumni Association
Midwest Livestock Systems, Inc.
NJN Financial Group

Nebraska Agribusiness Club
Nebraska Soybean Board
The ARC Group
Union Bank and Trust
Ward Laboratories
Zangger Popcorn Hybrids

LEADing the Way

The USDA reappointed **Greg Greving (LEAD XVIII)** to serve another term on the United Soybean Board. The Nebraska Soybean Board at their November meeting elected **Anne Meis (LEAD 33)** to serve as Vice Chair and **Mike Tomes (LEAD XXIV)** to serve as Secretary. **Tracy Zink (LEAD 35)** was appointed to the United Sorghum Checkoff Programs Board of Directors. **Hilary Maricle (LEAD 34)** was named the 2023 AgCeptional Woman of the Year during Northeast Community College's AgCeptional Women's Conference. **Dr. Terry Hejny (LEAD XX)** and Nebraska LEAD Program Director was presented the 2023 Golden Ear Award by the Nebraska Corn Growers Association in appreciation for his outstanding commitment to Nebraska's corn industry.

2024 International Study Travel Seminar with LEAD 41 Albania, Greece, and Italy

By Authors: Luke Zangger, Joe Ruskamp, Lance Pacht, and Rhett Montgomery

Thursday, January 4: Our International Study/Travel Seminar began on January 4 with late afternoon flights as LEAD Class 41 officially landed in Tirana, Albania, after a long day of travel.

The Denver crew landed in Frankfurt, Germany, at 12:04 p.m. local time. They had some time to kill before the Omaha crew landed - two and a half hours to be exact! The Omaha crew landed at about 2:00 p.m. local time. The groups caught up in Terminal B to wait out the six-hour layover before their final flight together to Tirana, Albania.

Day 2 – Friday, January 5:

After a short delay, the class landed at 11:12 p.m. local time. The tour guide and bus driver for the duration of our time in Albania met the group to take us to our first hotel. We arrived at Nano Farms Resort around 1:00 a.m. local time and were given an authentic Albanian welcome. The entire group was very excited to finally see a horizontal bed! After resting for a short time, preparations began for the first full day in Albania.

Day 3 – Saturday, January 6:

We started our morning with a tour of the Nano Resort, an agro-tourism operation where they have 100 milk goats, 6 milk cows, many ducks, a greenhouse, and orchards. Our breakfast was comprised of food grown entirely from the farm and was delicious.

Traveling back, we were able to stretch our legs with a walking tour of Tirana led by our amazing guide, Genti.

Tirana is a growing city with a modern twist based on a rich history of culture.

After lunch, we visited an atomic shelter built by the communist regime in the 1970s and is five stories deep with over 100 rooms. The project was top secret at the time of construction and was repurposed into a museum in 2014. Notable displays include former Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha's apartment within the shelter, as well as a unique display telling the story of how Albanian farmers aided the rescue of 30 American nurses and medical personnel in 1944. This was a very powerful tour experience and an insight into how much Albania has overcome in its history to become the country it is today.

Following the tour of the bunker, we traveled north to the city of Kruja. We enjoyed another traditional Albanian meal consisting of soup, assorted appetizers, and fruit. The highlight of the evening was entertainment from an Albanian folk band and dancers. The performance was very interactive with audience participation in the dancing and singing encouraged. Overall, it was a great conclusion to an awesome first day in the country of Albania!



Nano Farms Resort



LEAD 41 learns about citrus production.

Day 4 – Sunday, January 7: Our morning began with a walk through the Kruja Antic Bazaar, with more than 200 locally owned shops. We continued to the castle and visited the Ethnographical Museum and Skanderbeg Museum.

Next, in Fishta, we visited an Albanian family home and met with locals. Here we tried their traditional spirit Raki, sampled oranges produced from their citrus trees, and learned about their local history. We followed up lunch at Mrizi i Zanave with a tour of their facilities. A repurposed military prison, they produce and make wine, cheeses, and meats for their restaurant. We then traveled to Shkoder and toured the Venetian Mask Factory. This is the largest factory of handmade, authentic masks in the world with more than 2000 models of Venetian masks. The day was capped off with dinner at Tradita Geg & Tosk. We were served a multi-course Albanian meal highlighted with locally caught trout.

Day 5 – Monday, January 8:

After an overnight stay at the Hotel Tradita, we headed to Lac, Albania. We arrived at St. Anthony's Church of Lac. It was very interesting to learn about the history of the saints. Even more interesting were the discussions about what the people of early

Albania endured to be able to continue the practice of their religious beliefs. Saint Blaise was one of those people who went into hiding to avoid persecution. He was eventually captured and beheaded. This day's agriculture-related stop was at Domi Farm. Domi Farm specializes in gathering and packaging fresh produce. As a group, all the owners were determined to deliver fresh produce to all local markets. It was refreshing to see not all the produce had to be perfect. Their efforts were focused on feeding the people of their country the freshest product they could procure from the local growers.

Day 6 – Tuesday, January 9: Our day began with several history lessons. Gjirokastra is a UNESCO Heritage site and is dedicated to

building peace through international cooperation with the mission to eradicate poverty and drive sustainable development. Part of education is the preservation of history. Gjirokastra is full of history from the era of communism. There were many stone structures and stone bunkers built across the country to defend freedom. A visit to the Cold War Tunnel Museum was very eye-opening. It was another demonstration of a country of proud people willing to die to defend their homeland.

In Dhoksat Village we experienced even more warm welcomes from the people of Albania as we visited and toured a family farm. Landi was a very gracious host. Landi gave a tour of his farm which included goats, sheep, bees, and grapes. He shared with us, "My house belongs to God and guests." We experienced a very traditional and delicious lunch prepared by Landi's wife and mother. Later in the afternoon, we crossed the border driving to Ioannina, Greece.



Joe Ruskamp visiting the Cold War Tunnel Museum

Additional thoughts and observations regarding Albania:

Through the course of humanity, one measure of a society's success has been how well they take care of their young and their old. Albania is subject to this same scrutiny as well. However, there is one area of critique some of us never considered until traveling to Albania: the animals. In all the locations in which we traveled the cattle, goats, and sheep were all well taken care of, which would be expected especially if it is one's livelihood. However, this story lies with the ubiquitous stray dogs. In some countries avoiding aggressive street dogs is quite a formidable task. In Albania, this was not the case. When we reached our resting point each night, we would then travel by foot to explore our newfound surroundings and in every instance when we walked out of the hotel there would be one or two dogs close by. These dogs were not your average "mangy mutts." We could tell they were well cared for and well-fed. These dogs did not beg for affection or food but did not shy away if any was given. They greeted us in a very concerned way, eager to provide escort to wherever we may be going, and did so quite proudly. Once we arrived at our destination, they asked for nothing and just seemed content to perform their duties. When we left a location, it may or may not be the same dog providing escort, but each knew exactly the duties they were meant to perform and did so with the same pride. Those of us in animal husbandry or having just owned a pet know animals take on the personalities of those who care for them. It was through these stray dogs that an understanding and an appreciation for the people of Albania was illustrated.

Albania is on the southeastern European Balkan Peninsula. It is a small country about the size of Vermont, or seven times smaller than Nebraska. The western edge has Adriatic and Ionian coastlines and an eastern border crossed by the Albanian Alps. Albania sits at the gateway of the East and the West and to invade in either direction military commands would need to control the flats of Albania. This has led to a very complex history. Since the beginning of written history, and no doubt long before, Albania has been at the crossroads of continued civil unrest - from the time of Alexander the Great and the Macedonians, through the Romans, Ottomans,

Fascists, Nazis, and Communists. One only needs to look at the architecture to determine what political group was in power at its construction. Under communism, Albanians were forced to renounce their religious beliefs, adopt a secular way of life, and embrace a socialist ideology. Failure to do so was met with severe consequences

such as internal exile, extended imprisonment, and execution. Our guide Genti shared with us several stories associated with these acts, one of which pertained to an 18-year-old girl in the 1950s who would not renounce her Catholic faith. She was placed in a bag with cats and was then beaten until she succumbed to the blunt force trauma, the clawing and biting of the cats, or both. Genti grew up under the Communist Regime. He was told what to think, what he would be in life, and where he would live. He told us a story of when he was eleven years old and started to question life, as

most of us do. He asked his father, "Will Prime Minister Hoxha die?" His father's response was, "No he will never die; he will live forever." Of course, Prime Minister Hoxha did die in 1985, and years later Genti asked his father why he told him Hoxha would live forever. His father stated, "Because I feared for your safety and our family's safety."

Today, Albania has a greater understanding of and desire to be a part of the free world. Fear and loathing of America is no longer pervasive as LEAD Fellow Brian Schwartz experienced when he was hugged by an Albanian in downtown Tirana, the capital of Albania, and told, "I love Americans." This was an impactful encounter both will remember for a very long time.

Albania provides free education for its citizens. University students pay \$400 a year and those with good grades pay nothing. Private schools cost approximately \$3000 to \$5000 per year. Sixty percent of young people pursue higher education. Many Albanian families have migrated from rural areas to urban centers just so their children can have a better education. Albania also has free health care. Each person is assigned a social security number and regardless of employment, this right to free health care is afforded to them. Retirement age is currently 65, with Albania paying a stipend of approximately \$100 per month.

Currently, the ratio of working individuals to retired is 1 to 8 with a very high percentage of people receiving supplemental income from the government. To fund these programs of education, health care, and retirement there are two underlying issues. First, the tax rate is very high on both personal and business taxes. Personal salary tax is at 52% with the employer paying 39% and the employee 13%. Second, there is also a tax on businesses called a progressive tax calculated at 23% of profit. Albania's greatest export since the fall of communism has been its people. To support an older population and in the pursuit of higher paying wages, there has been a mass exodus of both professionals and laborers disbursing throughout Europe. Today, Albania is sitting at a new set of crossroads, one all societies have battled throughout time: how to take care of their young and their old without draining the resources of their society while maintaining a working population.

OUR MISSION: TO PREPARE AND MOTIVATE MEN AND WOMEN

The people of Albania are both proud and humble. This was evident through the traditions and culture they have maintained through years of repression. Many times they have been stripped of their ideologies, personal rights, and freedoms, and yet they have persevered. Like the stray dogs of Albania, every place we went, we were greeted openly and were provided with the very best they had to offer. In return, all that was asked of us was to feel welcome and safe.

Day 7 – Wednesday, January 10: After spending the night in Ioannina, Greece, we began our day by traveling by boat to a small island on Lake Pamvotida. Here we explored the backstreets and enjoyed time in nature. We then drove to Meteora to visit the monasteries. The monasteries were built for individual hermit monks. The monks preferred to live in isolation and prayer, and this was the perfect setting. The monasteries were built in caves and on mountainsides. Some of the caves in the area showed signs of human occupation from 135,000 B.C. to 4000 B.C. It was here



LEAD 41 touring the monasteries of Meteora.

we viewed many of the religious events captured in artwork. The paintings represented several religious events that occurred during the 14th Century. The surrounding formations of the mountains and structures are almost impossible to describe. After a long drive, we arrived in Delphi where we enjoyed a delicious dinner and overnight stay.

Day 8 – Thursday, January 11: After checking out of our hotel and loading our bus, we had a short drive to the Vagonetto Mining Park. Here we had the opportunity to follow the lives of the miners and visit an underground gallery. We learned the mineral bauxite, mined at this location, is used in concrete and aluminum production. We then drove back to Delphi where we visited the Temple of Apollo, dedicated to one of the Greek deities. The temple was a large part of the Panhellenic religion. Apollo is the god of archery, music, light, prophecy, the arts, and healing. The ruins of the temple date back to the 4th century B.C. According to an ancient Greek myth, Zeus (king of the gods) released two eagles - one to the east and one to the west, and Delphi was where they met, thus becoming known as the “center of the world.” Our day ended with a tour of

an olive production farm and culminated in an olive oil tasting. The farm harvested olives from 1.5 million trees. Most of the trees were between 400-500 years old, but there were some over 1,500 years old. We learned all olives are picked by hand. Later that day we made our way to Athens, the capital of Greece, where we spent the next two nights at Pollis Grand Hotel.

Day 9 – Friday, January 12: On this day we were originally scheduled to visit a marble quarry outside of Athens, but due to the weather it was closed. Instead, our local guide traveled with us to the Site of Thorikos, which is the location of the oldest known theater in Greece. We also visited an old mining location that had been used for quarrying marble and silver mining dating back to ancient times. In the afternoon, we met with several U.S. Embassy officials at our hotel discussing agriculture, energy, and commerce. Greece has one of the top financial economies in the world, which is very impressive considering how poor their economy was just 15 years ago, following the 2008 financial crisis. Greece’s main source of GDP is in transportation, which is primarily due to its ownership of 25% of the world’s cargo ships. The Greek government has focused on renewable energy in recent years as 50% of their energy production is in renewables, with a 2030 goal of 80%. Another takeaway from this meeting is the European Union’s investment in agriculture in Greece. They have focused on increasing their brand of Greek products that are well-known throughout the world.

Later in the afternoon, we enjoyed a walking tour of Athens and the Acropolis of Athens, where we had the opportunity to visit the Parthenon. The Parthenon was constructed over 2,460 years ago out of marble during the height of the ancient Greek Empire. It was amazing to see something that has been standing for so many years and certainly allowed us to appreciate it as an architectural achievement. Our final night in Greece found us at a local restaurant where we enjoyed traditional Greek food, music, and dancing. Everyone in the restaurant joined in the festivities and we could feel their pride in the Greek traditions.

Day 10 – Saturday, January 13: With an early morning checkout, we departed Athens bound for Milan, Italy. During the flight, we had views of the Adriatic Sea and multiple European mountain ranges, including the Swiss Alps. Upon clearing customs and immigration, we met our guide, Laura. We spent the day in Milan, which is a major financial hub of Europe and home to the National Stock Exchange. We embarked on a walking tour of the Milan City Center which included the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II and the Duomo di Milano Cathedral. The cathedral took over 600 years to build, is one of the largest cathedrals in the world, and its detail was magnificent. We also visited Castle Sforzesco; a huge medieval-renaissance fortress with historic museums and art by Da Vinci and Michelangelo. During our walking tour, we witnessed a peaceful protest, and we noted the similarities to the freedom of speech we have in the United States.

Day 11 – Sunday, January 14: After breakfast, we departed Milan and traveled south to Parma, where we toured Salumificio F.lli Canetti, which is a company that produces quality cured meats. The sausage factory started in 1971 and is associated with the Parma Ham Consortium - a type of Prosciutto. It is the premium of all hams and is world famous. After we toured the facility, we were fortunate enough to be able to taste test some of the Parma Ham produced



A peaceful protest in Milan, Italy.

locally and aged for 32 months. It did not disappoint. We then journeyed to Bologna, where we stopped by an Italian Food Theme Park called FICO Eataly World. It was a great learning experience that included the history and a tasting of the Bolognese specialty, sausage mortadella. We also learned about the production of Parmesan cheese and Italian wine and were able to taste-test both.

Day 12 – Monday, January 15: This day we continued learning about food production in Italy with a tour of Inalca, where they process beef. After a tour of the facilities, we met Luigi and his daughter, Claudia Cremonini, who shared with us the history of Inalca and their family business. Inalca was founded in 1963 by Mr. Luigi Cremonini. Inalca is recognized worldwide and the entire production chain of beef from farm to finished product is encompassed within their company. They shared that they import over \$7 million of Nebraska beef each year. One other interesting fact is that they have focused on sustainability for over 30 years. The Cremoninis are a wonderful family who have a passion for what they do, and we enjoyed visiting with and learning from them. Our next stop was at the Spaccio Biorggiani. Here we learned about the production process of the world-famous Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. We toured their dairy cattle facilities, learned about hay production, and toured the cheese production facility, cheese warehouse, and on-site store. They also provided a wonderful lunch of lasagna with fresh ricotta and mozzarella, followed by a chance to taste three different, aged Parmigiano Reggiano cheeses (a 12-month, a 20-month, and a 40-month). Again, the food did not disappoint. We finished our day traveling to Siena, in the Tuscany region, exploring another city with amazing culture and cuisine. These last two days were a wonderful experience of the whole food production cycle for famous Italian products. We were able to see how they originated, are processed, and the final product. We also witnessed some of the product branding with the Parma Ham and Parmigiano Reggiano cheese and the processes required to label and sell them as such. We found it interesting that all the businesses we visited in Italy focus on sustainability, converting waste to bi-products or energy, which is sold back to the grid. Like our time in Albania and Greece, we witnessed the pride the Italians have in what they do. They enjoyed sharing their products and culture with us.

Day 13 – January 16 and Day 14 – January 17: We continued our journey south through the rural areas of Italy and had the

opportunity to visit some medium-sized agriculture operations. Through the visits to the Terra Antica vineyard and the Bartolini farm, it was striking how themes of Nebraska agriculture, experienced for the past 17 months, were also evident in these Italian operations. For example: with the Bartolini olive oil operation, themes of family legacy and pride in being stewards of the land were evident as we were given a brief overview of their 6th generation, 600-hectare family farm. Photos of past generations adorned the walls in the rooms, and it was clear that the same pride Nebraska producers feel to be the next generation on their family's operation is a common thread in agriculture abroad as well.

Italian and Nebraska producers share similar concerns. Concerns such as water availability and usage, the use of chemicals and GMOs, government regulations, etc. are all issues that are very much at the forefront of these producers' minds. Drought was brought up more than once throughout these visits. It was interesting that while these operations are on the other side of the globe and growing vastly different products, the worries Nebraska producers are shared by those producing wine and olive oil in Italy. Another interesting point from our visit to Terra Antica, Bartolini, and Perugia Chocolates, was the need for these operations to separate themselves from their competition. This is something faced in Nebraska to some degree, but for the most part, we are growing commodities, bulk homogenous products whose price is often dictated by a 3rd party mechanism such as the board of trade. In Italy however, these agricultural producers have the challenge of distinguishing themselves from others making comparable products while all being designated as "authentic Italian products" by the government. Mario Morello, who gave us the tour of Terra Antica vineyard, shared a very interesting view on this. He explained how his operation - being relatively young at 10 years, compared to some of the neighboring Montepulciano vineyards that have been around for hundreds of years, forces him to "think outside the box." When creating his wines he focuses intensely on the pairings with certain foods, and even came up with a wine that incorporates the essences of Chinese tea, to pair especially well with Chinese foods. Without a doubt, this has opened the door to new markets for his product. His comments made us think about how this compares with the marketing of agricultural products in the U.S. It is similar in many ways to the beef industry, with Angus, grass-fed, all-natural, etc., allowing for producers to distinguish themselves from the competition.

We made our way to Rome, the capital of Italy. While driving around this city, it was impossible not to reminisce about our class's visit to Washington, D.C. Much of D.C.'s architecture undoubtedly drew inspiration from ancient Rome, being one of the earliest examples of a democratic republic in history.



Easton Eggers comparing wines.

OUR MISSION: TO PREPARE AND MOTIVATE MEN AND WOMEN

It was impactful to have the chance to visit the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel and to experience first-hand the world's capital of Catholicism. It was interesting to cap off our studies being immersed in what was the third major religion of our travels. The first two were Islam, the major religion of Albania (along with state atheism during the communist regime) and Eastern Orthodox Christianity in Greece. It is fascinating how these three religions have all expanded and contracted through these three neighboring countries, but now coexist very successfully from our outsiders' albeit limited observations. This was a positive takeaway from our studies, especially considering some of the religion-based conflicts we see in the world now and throughout history.

Guo Su. Mr. Su is the head of the FAO section and the First Secretary. Our conversation centered on the difficulties both countries face in rural areas. A few of those issues included rural health care, rural broadband, and labor.

LEAD 41's ISTS left us feeling blessed to have had the opportunity to explore these countries through a lens many tourists probably don't attempt. Many of us expected to go into these countries and see just how different U.S. agriculture is, but instead, we walked away being more impacted by the similarities we share. With our ever-shrinking world and the globalization of agriculture a foregone conclusion, it will prove crucial for future agriculture leaders to find complementary opportunities between our European allies rather than just focusing on differences and competition.

Nebraska LEAD Class 41 would like to thank each one of you for following along with us as we made our way through Albania, Greece, and Italy. We thoroughly enjoyed our experience and learned a great deal about international agriculture and culture.

We would like to say a special thank you to the



Meeting with Chinese officials and learning about common challenges.

Day 15 – January 18 and Day 16 – January 19:

We began our last full day in Italy by gearing up for our briefing at the U.S. Embassy to Italy, the Holy See, and the U.S. Mission to the United Nations Agencies in Rome. After a short bus ride and walk from the hotel we were processed into the embassy. This process included leaving phones, watches, etc. checked in until exiting. We met with Charles Rush, the Regional Agricultural Attache.

Following his warm welcome and briefing we heard from a variety of speakers whose talks touched on the agricultural situation in Greece, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Italy. We also met with the President of the Confagricoltura General Confederation of Agriculture in Italy, Massimiliano Giansanti.

During a short break, many of us visited the Colosseum, grabbed lunch, and then met at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for a guided tour. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations leading international efforts to eradicate hunger. FAO consists of 195 countries and the European Union. Our tour ended with a stop on the rooftop of the 8th floor to see the city from a higher level. Afterward, we met with members of the People's Republic of China's Mission to the FAO and had an interactive discussion with Mr.

Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council, IANR Vice Chancellor Mike Boehm, Dr. Hejny, the LEAD staff, and the IANR Media team, which consisted of Jason Cooper, Tim Svoboda, and Becky Aiken. Each one of you played a vital role in the success of the seminar. Additionally, we're appreciative to all of those who support the Nebraska LEAD Program in various ways. We thank those who made financial contributions, as well as those who share their time and talent in making Nebraska LEAD the best program of its kind. Finally, we say a special thanks to our friends and family for all your support through our LEAD journey.



LEAD 41 at Bartolini Olive Farm, Arrone, Italy.

Congratulations and Condolences

The Nebraska LEAD Program mourns the passing of **Lois Jean Hartmann** who passed away on March 16. Mrs. Hartmann was a member of the NALC Board of Directors from 1984-1987, served as State Selection/Recruitment Chair in 1984-1985, and as Secretary of the Board of Directors in 1986-87.

The Nebraska LEAD program also mourns the passing of and extends our sympathies to the families of **Luke Jacobsen (LEAD XXI)** who passed away on October 17, and **Eugene Friesen (LEAD X)** who passed away on February 7. Additionally, we extend our sympathies to **Joe Gangwish (LEAD XIX)** on the passing of his father, **John Hay (LEAD XXVII)** on the passing of his father, **Mark Stock (LEAD XXIX)** on the passing of his father, **Ernie Newquist (LEAD XXVIII)** on the passing of his mother, **John Beshaler (LEAD XIX)** on the passing of his mother, **Monte Murkle (LEAD 39)** on the passing of his father, **Lynn Belitz (LEAD XXVII)** on the passing of his wife, and **Boyd Stuhr, Jr. (LEAD XVII)** on the passing of his father.

We also congratulate **Ryan (LEAD 38)** and **Sarah Elizabeth Sandoz** on the birth of their son, Casen John on January 12, 2024. **Logan (LEAD 40)** and **Katie Sheets** on the birth of their son, Callen Michael on February 18, 2024. **Jamie (LEAD 41)** and **Matt Bright** on the birth of their son, MJ Alan on March 10, 2024. **Mitch (LEAD 40)** and **Laura Oswald** on the birth of their son, Merit Mitchell on March 11, 2024.

Our Bold Beginnings

"The Nebraska LEAD Program has been nothing short of transformational for me as a leader in my first year. The relationships I have built with my peers, LEAD alumni, and others throughout the state will last a lifetime. The program has challenged me to step out of my comfort zone and think about how I can make a difference in my community. The experiences have increased my awareness of the issues and opportunities that agriculture is facing, not only locally, but on a national and global scale as well. I am looking forward to my second year in LEAD, and encourage others to apply. Servant leadership is one of the most fulfilling and rewarding endeavors, and there is no better program than LEAD to help foster and develop great leadership."

— Wes Cammack, De Witt

"The Nebraska LEAD Program has exposed me to aspects of agriculture that I would not have otherwise understood or recognized as being a big part of what I consider everyday Nebraska life. I have gained a respect and understanding of what makes peoples' views differ from my own and hope to use this experience as a stepping stone to help Nebraska agriculture and more specifically my small rural community I call home."

— Blake Hokamp, Randolph

"I have personally been involved and familiar with the Nebraska LEAD Program for several years interacting with each new class during their Panhandle seminar. During this time I have come to learn that the relationships you make will be life-changing, both in your career and your personal life. Now that I am a current Lead class 42 Fellow, I can attest to the fact that LEAD is that and so much more. Our seminars have taught me so much. While speaking may come easily to me, LEAD has opened



my eyes to be more sensitive to other's thoughts and beliefs and has helped me refine and improve how I present myself. Another thing my time in this program has shown me is how small the agriculture world is and how interconnected we all are. As much as I have enjoyed my first year of the program, I am greatly looking forward to the next year and what it has to bring. It's crazy to think how much I've learned this first year and what I am capable of this next year. LEAD can give you that push and confidence you need to make a difference in your community. Whether that's your local school board, state legislature, or something even bigger, we need to keep agriculture first and foremost."

— Jessica Palm, Mitchell

"LEAD has been one of the best learning experiences I have ever had. It has broadened my exposure to many different agricultural industries throughout the state and nation. I have developed a new-found appreciation for everyone involved in the AG industry - from start to finish. The biggest takeaway has been the examples of what it looks like to be a humble, servant leader. Learning from those examples has made me more confident in taking leadership roles in my community. There is not a better program for anyone serious about growing as an individual and a leader. I appreciate all the organizations and individuals who have invested in myself and LEAD Class 42 to become the next generation of leaders and advocates of agriculture."

— Logan Reed, Holdrege



Dr. Allen Blezek Memorial Fellowship

We continue to work to fully fund the Dr. Allen Blezek Memorial Fellowship. Dr. Blezek positively impacted so many lives; please consider making a donation to this Fellowship by visiting the NU Foundation's website.

<http://nufoundation.org/Blezek>

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Nebraska
LEAD
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Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council
YESTERDAY - TODAY - TOMORROW
NEBRASKA'S LEADERSHIP LEGEND

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**Applicants Wanted for
Nebraska LEAD Class 43**

**The application deadline is
June 15, 2024.**

Seminars begin fall 2024.

**Contact the LEAD office via email at
leadprogram@unl.edu or call 402-472-6810.**



Use this QR code to share a
memory/photo or send a message.

**Please join us for fellowship and
refreshments!**

**East Campus Union, Prairie Suite
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Thursday, May 9**

**We will be holding a reception for
Nebraska LEAD Program Director, Dr. Terry Hejny**

**Join Us In Celebrating
Dr. Hejny's LEADership Career**



**The Allen G. Blezek
2024 Friend of LEAD Award**

The 2024 recipient of the Allen G. Blezek Friend of LEAD Award is **Donna Hutchen**. Donna, with her husband Don Hutchen (LEAD I), graciously hosted LEAD fellows and their spouses in their home for a meal and an evening of fellowship for 30 years. Donna's hospitality and generous support for our Nebraska LEAD Program have been greatly appreciated.