The LEAD Review

Issue 73, Spring 2017

The LEAD Review is a publication of the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council. The NALC, a membership organization, sponsors the Nebraska LEAD Program.

Administration:
Nebraska LEAD Program
Dr. Terry Hejny, Executive Director
Shana Gerdes, Administrative Associate
Kimberly Braaten, Administrative Assistant

2016-2017 Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council Officers of the Board
Terry Schutte, Chair, Lincoln
Greg Ibach, Vice Chair, Lincoln
Leland Poppe, Secretary, North Platte
Jarid Childears, Treasurer, North Platte
Dr. Terry Hejny, President, Lincoln
Jill Brown, IANR Representative and Ex-Officio Member, Lincoln

Members of the Board
Cindi Allen, Ogallala
Bryan Barrett, Gering
Dr. Eric Brown, Lincoln
Kelly Brunkhorst, Lincoln
Jim Farrell, Omaha
Galen Frenzen, Fullerton
Kerry Glandt, Grand Island
Carol Hudkins, Malcolm
Stephanie Liska, Wayne
Dr. Brad Lubben, Lincoln
Lori Pankoke, Lincoln
Pat Rasmussen, Geneva
William Rhea III, Arlington
Royce Schaneman, Lincoln
Dr. Ray Ward, Kearney
Ed Woeppe, Lincoln

Please send inquiries, change of address and all correspondence to:
Nebraska LEAD Program
PO Box 830940
Lincoln, NE 68583-0940
Phone: 402-472-6810
FAX: 402-472-6799

©The LEAD Review 2017, all rights reserved
www.lead.unl.edu

Director's Update

By Dr. Terry Hejny, Director
Nebraska LEAD Program

We are pleased to present to you this issue of The LEAD Review. It is our attempt to keep you updated on the happenings of the Nebraska LEAD Program.

With the graduation of Nebraska LEAD Group 35 on March 10, a milestone was reached . . . . (Drum roll, please). Over 1,000 Nebraska residents have now participated in the Nebraska LEAD Program! I believe congratulations are in order to everyone who has been a part of this program from our beginnings in 1981: our LEAD participants, the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council, the Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Ag Builders of Nebraska, our previous LEAD directors, our campus coordinators, administrators, and faculty at our many partner institutions throughout our state, and our many donors . . . all of who have contributed their time, talents, and resources to make the Nebraska LEAD Program the very best in our nation. For this, we are all so very thankful.

English novelist David Mitchell said, “Travel far enough and you meet yourself.” I believe this is how you discover more about your own values, morals, and character. To do this, you must place yourself in a position far away from your comfort zone. That is one of the objectives of our leadership program and why, among other reasons, we explore international issues by traveling abroad.

I hope you enjoy reading about the international study/travel seminar our LEAD 35 group experienced in the People’s Republic of China, Laos, and Thailand. Three very different cultures, with the common link being their role in logistics and trade with the U.S. The briefings by U.S. Embassy officials in Beijing and Bangkok, farm visits, tours of temples, and connections with consumers in these three countries, provided a global perspective that is vital for future leaders in our industry.

Even more important than the knowledge of how agriculture works in different parts of the world, is the experience of world travel. While some in our leadership class have been on foreign tours with agricultural commodity groups

(continued on next page)
A Message From the Chair of the Board

Terry Schutte

Last week I participated once again in the graduation of a LEAD Class. LEAD Class 35 will be my last graduation as a member of the board and its chair. It has been a privilege to be a part of and to lead the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council. You can feel secure that we have a solid partnership with the University of Nebraska and that the program remains financially sound. With the graduation of LEAD 35, we now have over 1000 LEAD alumni! To see the impact of the LEAD Program, you need not look further then the leadership of our commodity groups, state and local governments, civic organizations, and industry.

As we look toward spring it is once again time to think about future LEAD class participants. Each year we recruit 30 new LEAD Fellows from our 93 counties. Who are those future leaders in your town, city, or county? Who are the farmers, ranchers, or agribusiness leaders that could find and give value to our program? Recruiting the next generation of leaders and keeping the LEAD Program relevant to the leadership demands of today and tomorrow are the keys to our long-term success.

Thank you to all that have supported our program including our board of directors, volunteers and contributors. Our industry support of the LEAD Program has never been stronger. The NALC board members wish you all the best in the coming year!

Finally, thanks to Terry, Shana and Kimberly for taking care of our program on a daily basis and making it into the premier program in the country. Your leadership and teamwork is truly appreciated.

Triumph of Agriculture Annual Agri-Award

Dr. Terry Hejny, Nebraska LEAD Program Director, was honored with the 2017 Triumph of Agriculture Agri-Award. Hejny, received this award from Bob Mancuso, Jr. at the opening day luncheon at the CenturyLink Center Omaha on March 8. The Triumph of Agriculture Exposition established the Annual “Agri-Award” as part of Nebraska’s Centennial Celebration, in 1976 to recognize outstanding organizations and individuals that have contributed to the Agricultural Development in the Midwestern area.
Invoking Oz?
Shana Gerdes

It was the final lunch to be shared by our LEAD 35 Fellows before becoming LEAD alumni. Bob Andersen was the keynote speaker during the Spader Leadership Luncheon where he addressed topics of leadership and service on boards.

In broad terms, the take away for me was: boards should not invoke in those it is in service to, the image of the mysterious figure behind the curtain pulling levers and blowing smoke. Mr. Andersen spoke about the importance of integrity within oneself and in the processes inherent in the work of a board. Integrity to self mandates adhering to core leadership values. Bob addressed the problems technology can bring, in detriment to the integrity of a board’s processes, by facilitating circumvention of proper board procedures and open communication. Expediency and/or convenience do not justify skirting board policies meant to ensure transparency.

Encouraging involvement by new people is critical to the long term viability of any organization. Bob stressed that if a board didn’t have a training session for its new members, the responsibility falls to each board member to read any manuals provided and understand the mission statement of the organization they are serving.

It can be a fatal blow to community involvement when a board fails to be transparent or fails to allow people to have a voice. Bob stressed that integral to being a productive member of any board is listening to all viewpoints, being respectful of those viewpoints and the individuals conveying them. Our Nebraska LEAD Program aims to prepare Fellows to be board members such as Bob describes: willing to work, be respectful, and act with integrity—with the curtains wide open.

Thank You Departing NALC Board Members

The Nebraska LEAD Program thanks Greg Ibach and Terry Schutte 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. We thank them for their time, wisdom, and leadership skills and for helping us to shape the promising future we share.

New to LEAD
Kimberly Braaten

“...to prepare and motivate men and women in agriculture for more effective leadership”

The mission statement of the Nebraska LEAD Program is what drew me to the program, as it’s like a page from my family history. My grandfather, Oren Lee Staley, was an articulate, strong leader of a segment of agriculture, attempting to facilitate a nationwide organization of farmers and ranchers, to price their products during a volatile period in ag history. He was president of the National Farmers Organization, and along with other farm organizations, notably the Farm Bureau, National Grange, and National Farmers Union, as well as individual commodity groups, worked aggressively to the betterment of rural living. I cherish that heritage, and recognize that the University of Nebraska has been a leader, in the implementation of the dream of education for all in this important segment of the country, the overall agriculture economy. Many members of my family have followed in my grandfather’s footsteps in various ways, from farming and running our family farms, to working at Farm Credit Services, and others being attorneys in agriculture.

Needless to say, agriculture is something that is very close to my heart. I have a vested interest in agriculture, because many in my family own farms, as well as being active farmers and ranchers. I am excited to have the opportunity to be working with the LEAD Program, as for me, it feels like coming home, back to my roots and the cornerstone of my family ideals. Having just started in December, I have learned a lot already and am looking forward to learning more and getting to know the many people involved with the LEAD Program.

So that you can get to know me a little better, here is some further background on me. I am a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, having earned my Bachelor’s degree in History and English. My husband is an attorney here in Lincoln, and we have two teenage sons who keep us very busy. In my free time, I like to fish, travel, read, and spend time with family and friends.

I am excited to witness what the future holds for agriculture and the LEAD Program. I want to thank each of you for the warm welcome I have received, and I look forward to working with you all. Together, we will continue to prepare men and women to be effective leaders and leave their positive mark on agriculture.

kbraaten2@unl.edu
Early in the morning of January 6, LEAD 35 and Dr. Hejny met in Omaha to begin the International Study Travel Seminar. Our ISTS got off to a bit of a bumpy start due to a frozen potable water line on our plane. Our flight was delayed four hours, causing us to miss our connection in San Francisco, to Beijing. Deciding to make lemonade with our lemons, several LEAD Fellows took in some San Francisco sites including: a Warriors NBA game, Alcatraz Island, the Golden Gate Bridge, and China Town.

On January 7, our class departed San Francisco on a rainy and dreary Saturday morning and arrived in Beijing late on the afternoon of January 8. We were greeted by the first sunny, blue sky, day the Chinese had seen in several weeks. We enjoyed a roasted Peking duck dinner that evening; served the traditional Chinese way. The manager of our tour company gave us a very generous toast, thanking the U.S. for our long history of helping China.

We were very surprised to see how “American” Beijing was. There was English on nearly every sign and the city itself was quite clean and very “first” world. One glaring difference from the U.S. was the phenomenal amount of scooter traffic. They were everywhere. The cars we saw would be considered luxury vehicles in the United States. There were many BMWs, Mercedes and Lexuses. The only way to tell on the surface, that we were in a developing nation, was the electrical line “mess.”

Early on the morning of January 9, LEAD 35 navigated from our hotel and through security to the U.S. Embassy. Here we met with representatives from commerce, economic and political sections, as well the USDA and FDA. Some highlights from the meeting included:

- The need for a continuing Chinese-U.S. relationship and bilateral trade between the countries to help grow both economies. Chinese and U.S. officials have worked together to fight terrorism, disease in Africa, and work toward peace in the Middle East.
  - The population of China is 1.3 billion people.
  - Agricultural industries make up 9% of the current GDP. Total production of agricultural products in the country is the largest, by volume, in the world.
  - China is trying its best to dominate Asia Pacific.
  - We need to keep a strong presence so we don’t lose opportunities for trade with this massive population.
  - China has experienced large poverty alleviation in the last decade, partly due to allowing capitalistic ideals to penetrate communist rule. Chinese economics have been booming in the last twenty years. The government still operates in a one-party communist system, but private industry has made its way into the country. The state owns and controls everything. There is no business of significant size that is free from party influence. The government has parameters and rules to control markets and the movement of goods. Capital flight, the flowing of assets or money flowing out of the country, is a current worry. To fight this, the government is working to appreciate its own currency, the yuan (¥), against the dollar.
  - China is one of the largest manufacturers of medical prescription active ingredients.
  - The centralized Chinese government is working on three key points in the agriculture industry: food security, safety, and sustainability.
  - American agriculture equipment sales in China have been hindered by restrictive policy requiring 70% of farm equipment to be made in China. Importing U.S. beef into China is a current topic of discussion. There is growing demand for beef imports into China as the middle class becomes wealthier. U.S. officials are working on protocol to get our beef into China, but are not optimistic that it will be worked out anytime in the near future.
  - Current President, Xi Jinping, has made protectionist moves to further centralize the government. Stability of the nation is a priority in a one party system. Economics and food security are the primary issues that help to maintain stability, according to the Chinese government.

In the afternoon, LEAD 35 tackled the Great Wall of China. We were impressed by its magnitude and engineering. That evening, we departed Beijing by airplane to Shanghai.

In Shanghai, on January 10, LEAD 35 was able to visit a local government funded community center. This community gathering place resembled a combination of a library and a YMCA. Many activities for the elderly were offered which included: dancing, Ping-Pong, and musical recitals. There was a computer lab where many participants researched news, stocks and bonds, and watched entertainment. This facility promoted many cross-generational programs including children and seniors reading books to each other.
Later in the morning our group visited a Kindergarten with children 3-5 years old attending. This school is publicly funded, but parents pay an additional ¥700 for their children to attend. Each Fellow was matched with a student when we arrived at the Kindergarten. Our class performed the Hokey Pokey and taught the children its words and actions.

In small groups of 5-6, LEAD Fellows had the privilege of experiencing a family style lunch in local residents’ apartments. We had traditional meals that were served one course at a time on a lazy Susan. My group’s conversation centered on family structure. A point made from our tour guide Linda was that, “since materialism has come to China, the divorce rate has skyrocketed from 4% in the 1980’s to over 20% in 2016.”

China is working to promote energy efficient companies to help manage pollution. One tactic used by the SUS Environment Company in Shanghai, is to burn trash to fuel steam-driven turbines, thereby producing electricity. This company is a public-private venture. Many technologies are being incorporated from models used in European Union and Japanese biomass to energy conversion plants. SUS Environment Company receives eighty million yuan in equity funds annually from the state.

Street markets or “wet” markets are a popular place for local Chinese people to sell and buy goods. On January 11, as we walked through these markets, we saw many food items, predominately seafood. We also saw chicken and many types of fruits and vegetables. Fellows observed: “This would never be legal in America because of FDA standards,” and “There were many meat markets that butchered the animals directly in front of you.”

The Silk Road has been a major trade route in Asia for over 2000 years. The route connected China with countries in Africa and Europe. The Fellows had the opportunity to visit a silk museum and learn about the processes of making silk into various clothing pieces and bedding. They were even able to get hand-on and participate in making a blanket by stretching out pieces of silk. Later that evening we flew from Shanghai to Guilin.

We had breakfast at the old Holiday Inn in Guilin. After checking out, we raided the gift shop to stock up on packaged snacks to get us through the day and maybe the night. We weren’t sure what our next meals would be like. A cold front moved in from the north causing Guilin and the limestone mountains to be much colder than expected. Along with the cold came a light but constant rain that lasted all day and night. Our lodging this evening was higher in the mountains. We had to take a short hike to get there since buses could not make it all the way up the mountain. Although the local villagers offered to haul our luggage in bamboo baskets, we had been encouraged to pack a small bag for the night to make things easier and leave our large bags at the hotel in Guilin, where we would return the next day.

The morning of January 13, we made our way out of Guilin to a water buffalo dairy. All along the countryside, small plots of fields (rarely larger than an acre, but usually much smaller) were scattered among the flat valleys, pockets of trees, and hillsides. Thirty minutes outside the city we turned off the main highway and headed up a steep, freshly paved road, that our guide says was just built due to the expansion of tourism in the area. After a short distance, we reached what appeared to be a large man-made lake, created by a fairly modern dam. We exited the bus and walked a quarter of a mile where we came upon our destination.

On approaching the first open-sided barn, we saw the water buffalo used for milk production still in the head catches from that morning’s milking. The owner introduced himself and gave us a brief history of the place as our guide, James, interpreted. He explained that due to low demand and even lower prices, they had all but dispersed their water buffalo herd. Leaving them with no more than around 30 head. Nearby was an enclosed barn, filled with a vast series of solid brick stalls 4 ft. high, 3 ft. wide, and 4 or 5 ft. long. In each pit were two or three porcupines. These were raised for meat and get 60 ¥/lb. It takes 5 months to raise them before harvesting. Underneath a lean-to shed was a series of small framed boxes made from Plexiglass/porcelain squares notched together. These contained a guinea pig/marmot looking animal called a bamboo rat that he sold for the meat - also for 60 ¥/lb. Next to the bamboo rats were 4 sets of old bunk bed frames wrapped in chicken wire to create a large cage for raccoon-like animals that have no easily translated name. This animal was also raised for its meat at 120 ¥/lb. Only the meat is used from the three animals; the fur and quills are all scrapped.

After a closer look at the water buffalo, we went to the owner’s new restaurant and tasting room. Here we sampled warm pasteurized milk from the water buffalo. Like many farmers in the area, he was taking advantage of the tourism boom and opening his farm to visitors.

Returning to Guilin for lunch at a local restaurant, we enjoyed a good meal of local cuisine. Leaving Guilin, we traveled through some flat countryside surrounded by large limestone mountains, after which we began our ascent of the mountain. Even in the rain our bus kept an even pace, quickly getting up the mountain by passing cars and trucks when needed. We were nervous at times, but the driver didn’t...
seem fazed. Two hours later, we arrived at the entrance to the mountain villages. Our bus had to be left and a local bus took us even farther up the mountain. After passing through villages surrounded by rice terraces, we finally arrived at the base of our village. We were exhilarated by the daredevil-like drive up and the indescribably gorgeous landscape. It seemed as though we were in another world, out of a book. We felt far from the open plains and fields of Nebraska.

At the gate we were met by a handful of local villagers carrying bamboo baskets on their backs, waiting to convey our luggage up the long and steep, rugged road. Many of the porters were the same age as our grandparents, no doubt made strong by a rough life. James, our tour guide, arranged the porters and we began our ascent to our hotel. The path was like none I had ever seen. It was a narrow trail made of rocks and random tiles that scaled the mountain. It wound between the shacks, steep drop offs, and alleys behind the houses. The houses seemed to be built on the very edge of the hillsides, often supported by nothing more than bamboo scaffolding and shady cement work. The vegetation was thick along the trail.

After what seemed like forever and the steepest staircase I had ever climbed, we finally reached our destination. This being a small hotel at the top of the village, looking down over the rice terraces and village. Although on the rustic side, it had modern amenities and was very clean. We checked in and then congregated in the lobby/dining area to split into our study groups to discuss our assigned topics. After some really in depth discussions and tasting of local beverages, we moved to another area for a traditional supper. Although really in depth discussions and tasting of local beverages, our study groups to discuss our assigned topics. After some really in depth discussions and tasting of local beverages, we moved to another area for a traditional supper. Although really in depth discussions and tasting of local beverages, our study groups to discuss our assigned topics. After some really in depth discussions and tasting of local beverages, we moved to another area for a traditional supper.

Rice Terraces of China

After an early breakfast, we trekked farther up the mountain, to the highest point, where there was an observation area. We enjoyed a breathtaking view of the mountain valley covered in rice terraces, as well as the surrounding villages built into the valley walls and bottom. A sign at the observation area explained it was known as “Seven Stars with the Moon” viewpoint. The Seven stars referred to the seven different hillsides covered in glistening water of the rice terraces that could be seen.

After we caught our breath we began our descent on foot. On the way down the mountain we stopped at the different vendors and tried out our bargaining skills as we browsed souvenirs. We made it back to our first bus and continued our journey.

After lunch in a village, we completed our travels down the mountain. Back in Guinlin, we toured the largest, privately owned, rice processing plant in China. We visited their labs and observed the testing for hazardous minerals in all the incoming rice from local farmers. We moved on to the unloading, storing, cleaning, and grading machines. These machines were very modern and efficient. We viewed the bagging and warehouse portion of the facility. Finally, we were given a quick view of the required government rice reserves area. After a brief presentation from the plant manager, we asked many questions and said our goodbyes.

That evening we had dinner at the Sheraton Hotel and met with a local official from the Chinese Agriculture Board. Knowing that we would be traveling into more uncharted territories, we enjoyed the amazing dinner selections. These were as close to westernized food as we had seen so far. After dinner, we engaged in a very interesting discussion about ag policies in relation to the government and farming practices. We often wished there wasn’t a language barrier so that we could more clearly understand the information shared. With an early morning departure, it was time to return to the hotel for some much needed sleep.

The next morning, we departed for the train station to catch our train to Guangzhou where we would fly to Vientiane, Laos. We were informed that the train would be very busy, security very strict, and to be aware of pickpockets. Because it was the Chinese New Year, many Chinese were traveling to visit their families and the countryside. With our passports secure, we unloaded the bus and prepared for the challenge ahead.

Upon entering the station, our luggage was quickly scanned with an explosives detector and placed on a conveyor belt to be x-rayed. We were on our way within in a few minutes. Our group had our own train car. We were able to spread out, relax, and enjoy the scenery as we flew through the mountainous countryside at a whopping 150 mph. After four or five quick stops at small stations, we were in Guangzhou. We were met by our local guide, who arranged our lunch and travel to the airport for our flight to Vientiane.

Over lunch we discussed what we liked and learned about China. We finally arrived at the airport and started the lengthy check-in process that goes with international air travel. We boarded the plane, ready for our next adventure in Laos. During our flight, dinner was served. It was the usual...
chicken, rice and vegetables in a tin can type of container. We dug in as we had become accustomed to eating when we could. Although it was a pretty uneventful day, we were all exhausted upon arrival in Vientiane. Routine now, we loaded our luggage on the bus and headed to a restaurant.

After we cleared immigration and customs early on the evening of January 15, the first thing we learned in Laos was that locals do not pronounce the “s” in Laos. The s was added by the French after they ousted the Thais, who had overthrown Laos in the early 1800s. Pronouncing the s signifies that you are a foreigner. We also learned: Vientiane means “city of sandalwood,” eighty percent of the population are farmers, and the majority of farmers grow only for their family’s consumption.

Our experiences with the Buddhist temples of the region began on the morning of January 16. The first one we visited was Wat Sisaket, which houses thousands of miniature Buddha statues. We learned about the symbolism of the different postures of the statues. We also learned about stupas, the place where the cremated ashes of Buddhists are stored. We learned that all Buddhists are cremated and all can have their ashes buried at the temple, but the size of the stupa signifies social status. The Seim is the main structure of worship and the cloisters are the ring of buildings around the Seim. Temples in Laos do not have cloisters. The interior of the Seim is highly decorative and houses many items visitors bring such as candles and flowers. No photographs can be taken within the Seim.

We learned fascinating things at each temple, especially about the lives of Buddhist monks. We learned boys can become monks at 10 years of age, but sometimes if the family is extremely poor, the boy can enter earlier. Monks eat 2 meals per day, and they do not eat food after noon. There is a list of 10 animals that cannot be eaten by Buddhists, including snakes, dogs, cats, elephants, tigers, and humans.

At the Wat Prakeo temple we learned more about the Plain of Jars, an area with 1000 giant jars that are 3,000 years old. There was a jar from the region at this temple. The actual region is very dangerous so we did not visit. There are mixed ideas regarding the use of the jars. Some thoughts are burial, cooking, or water collection. Wat Prakeo is famous for housing the Emerald Buddha, before it was taken to Thailand during their invasion of Laos.

The COPE Center is a rehabilitation center and orthotic/prosthetic fitting site. As an occupational therapist, visiting this place was a highlight of the seminar for me. The primary reason for the center is that of the 3 million tons of bombs dropped on Laos during the Vietnam War, 30% did not detonate at that time. Many people continue to lose limbs, as well as their lives, as bombs detonate when a farmer strikes it with a hoe or someone lights a fire. Another sobering fact our guide told us was many Laotians who supported the United States during the Vietnam War, were forced to flee to refugee camps in Thailand when the war was over. Our guide was born in such a refugee camp. Later his family moved to the U.S. and then, as an adult, he moved back to Laos in 1990.

After lunch we traveled to the Center of Agriculture outside the city of Vientiane. Its mission is to help local farmers learn how and what to plant in order to increase their ability to provide extra income for their families. Families are invited to stay in on-site dorms and are paid a fee, including transportation, for attending the center for 2 weeks. The center provides families with fruit trees such as jackfruit, lychee, longan, and mango. They also provide hard wood tree seedlings, fish, and poultry. The center is supported by the Thai government as an outreach activity. According to the official on site, the Thai government understands that when, “bellies are full, discord between neighbors is less.”

On the morning of January 16, our flight across Laos from Vientiane to Luang Prabang was very enjoyable. This was a great way to see the countryside. We were informed that roads were impassable by bus between the two cities due to drug traffickers and extremely rough terrain.

Visible during our flight was the Mei Kong River; the 9th longest river in the world. In some places, the river divides Laos and Thailand, but most of the river flows within Laos. There is talk of China building a high-speed train from China to Luang Prabang. This will require the construction of many
bridges across the river. In the past, Laos has been under the control of foreign governments. Many locals are very leary of letting the Chinese undertake this project.

In Luang Prabang, we visited the Agriculture and Forestry Office where we were fortunate to have a high-ranking official speak to us. We were also unfortunate, because his English was difficult to understand. However, we could tell he was very proud to know English and that he had a wealth of knowledge. We were all able to smile and nod, and we hope that he did not realize how lost we were during his presentation.

Later in the afternoon, we traveled to the National Ag and Forestry College that is known as a “center of excellence in sustainable farming.” The campus includes dorms, administration and classroom buildings, rice fields, an orchard, a pasture, and a forest. Once again, there appeared to be some miscommunication as the college girls we met seemed to think we were a group that sponsored part of their tuition. Maybe in the near future, several of us will be those people.

Early on January 17, before the sun was up, we departed our hotel for the Almsgiving Ceremony. This is a unique tradition in which people line up to give food to the monks as they enter the temple for the day. The monks are not permitted to prepare their own food, so they rely on this ceremony each day for their meals. We saw some of the monks taking food out of their baskets just before entering the temple. We later learned some vendors sell things the monks are not allowed to eat to tourists. The monks then give this food to others to give to the poor.

The rest of the day was filled with learning more of the culture and diversity of the people of Laos. We learned about the making of amazing tapestries and the dying process to get the beautiful colors. After lunch we traveled outside the city to visit an elephant refuge. Many of us rode the elephants, and we were able to see them up close. This place was a wonderful backdrop for the heartfelt reflections we were able to share with each other.

The evening brought us into the home of a village elder. He hosted a Baci ceremony in which we were allowed to participate. We observed area youth dancing and playing instruments as the elders beamed with pride. That evening, many of us explored the night market, taking in all the sights, sounds, and smells, including drinking coconut water straight from the coconut.

We departed Luang Prabang, Laos, for Bangkok, Thailand, on a morning flight on January 18. The arrival and introductory bus ride to Bangkok left us all a bit speechless. The traffic was unlike anything we’d experienced thus far, which is a significant statement. Our guide informed us that traffic congestion varies significantly and can take 30 minutes or two-plus hours for the same distance. The slow progress allowed us to more thoroughly observe the buildings and people of Thailand.

During the transport times we were able to discuss many topics with our guide. It was interesting to learn about their police and how extensive and widespread corruption is. He explained that Thai people have a like/hate, good/bad relationship with the police. They can be helpful, but also harass in order to receive an “appreciation” for not issuing a ticket. Our guide also explained that prostitution is legal in Bangkok, and how to respond if we were approached.

It was a rare opportunity to be in Thailand during the ongoing mourning period for their late King, Bhumibol Adulyadej. He was beloved by the Thai people and ruled for seven decades. As we toured the city, impressive and elaborate memorials were at every turn. Many continued to honor the black dress code three months after his death. The King is lying in state at the Royal Grand Palace. Tens of thousands of people were in formal black dress waiting to honor him.

We were honored to visit centuries old temples. Although none of our LEAD Fellows practiced these religions or beliefs, it was apparent that each of us respected their devotion and the peacefulness that existed there. We remain in awe of the overall beauty and historic value.

We spent the morning at the U.S. Embassy hosted by the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) which is under the direction of Christine Sloop. Paul Welcher, Agricultural
Attaché, informally shared with us what living and working in Bangkok is like for an American. He and his peers at FAS focus solely on agriculture and trade policies. They work on both the barriers and non-barriers for trade, “we help the conversations happen.” Ms. Sloop emphasized the embassy doesn’t delve into politics. During this period of transition, they are waiting for guidance from our new administration. The goals of the FAS include: 1) market promotion, 2) trade facilitation, 3) policy engagement, and 4) technology building capabilities. She stated that Thailand’s agriculture plan for the next five years includes supporting the small farmers and helping them to grow larger.

Andrew Armstrong discussed political topics and briefly outlined the situation with Thailand’s King’s death and the monarchy versus the military. He described Bangkok as the hub for all areas in the region and the United States’ relationship with Thailand, which dates back to 1818.

Rachel Mueller discussed economic conditions and noted that this area has the second largest economy in the Asian region. There are many U.S. companies operating in Thailand and customs troubles are rampant. Of economic concern to Thailand is their aging population, the skill level of eligible workers, and declining academic test scores.

Paul Welcher discussed the concerns over China’s attempt to purchase land in Thailand and how China is a significant tourism contributor. However, they only interact with Chinese owned businesses so Thailand’s economy does not benefit.

Jeff Willnow, with Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), reiterated their main mission is to protect American agriculture and promote proper agriculture procedures. They are working hard to reopen the beef market; the high-end specialty market is the first inroad. The large tariff differential we have is a key challenge.

We also heard from U.S. Soybean Export Council and the U.S. Dry Bean Council. Both organizations shared with us how they are educating and promoting our products to the Thai people, and how long they have had to work to make the progress advancing their respective commodities.

The following additional key points were made during presentations and following our questions:

- Tariffs must be a priority discussion.
- The Thai people and businesses are open to using U.S. products, and in general they view them as quality. Price is an issue and requires significant marketing to communicate the value.
- If the FAS staff had one suggestion to the new U.S. administration it would be to remain in the negotiations for TPP.

The Embassy visit was the last formal meeting of our ISTS experience and we departed reinvigorated, excited, and better prepared to follow the progress and relationships between ourselves and Laos, Thailand, and the Asian region.

The highly informative meeting was followed by a rush of anxiety for many in LEAD 35. Our visit to Red Cross Snake Farm was much more than we could have anticipated. In typical LEAD style, it put many of us in uncomfortable surroundings. The presentation was interesting and we have a new awareness of the importance of snake farms in their creation of bite serums, and a greater appreciation for snake handlers.

At times on our journey we participated in tourist activities and our farewell dinner cruise fell into that category. However, there is a significant difference. Once you are a LEAD Fellow you view everything with a wider lens. You have different interactions. You process all of the information in an eclectic manner. We met groups from all over the world. We saw Bangkok from a different angle. We had time together to reflect, laugh, and appreciate the incredible privilege that is LEAD! It was beautiful and relaxing.

January 20th was the longest day of our lives. Our final hotel check-out began at 3:00 a.m. in Thailand and we retrieved our bags in Omaha at 10:30 p.m. on January 20th. With the changes in time zones, we traveled for 36 total hours and covered 8,500 air miles. Many LEAD Fellows were officially home at that point. Several had two to four additional hours to travel, but our most western Fellow continued via the highway for an additional SIX hours! There continues to be no way to describe how great it was to be HOME.

Days filled with good food, skyscrapers and temples, beautiful landscapes, excellent weather, and an abundance of agricultural information, makes for a lot of eye-opening learning experiences. The people we met in China, Laos, and Thailand were extremely friendly and willing to answer our questions. For all of the differences we experienced, there were also many similarities to our state and nation. The people we encountered had a love of, and passion, for what they do each day and were excited to share their stories with us. They know as well as we do, that our world is getting smaller and we are all global citizens.

Nebraska LEAD Group 35 would like to express its appreciation to the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council and its Board of Directors, Vice Chancellor Michael Boehm and IANR-UNL, Dr. Terry Hejny, our many donors and sponsors, our families and friends, and our entire LEAD family for making our International Study Travel Seminar possible.
LEADing the Way!

Seth Davison (LEAD 35) was promoted to Assistant Vice President Agricultural Lending Division, Union Bank & Trust.

Richard Pierce (LEAD VIII) is serving on Nebraska Cattlemen’s Board of Directors and is the vice chairman of the Taxation Committee. He is also currently serving on National Cattlemen’s Beef Association’s Taxation and Finance Committee.

Paul Kenney (LEAD IX) was elected as a member to the University of Nebraska Board of Regents representing District 6.

Bruce Bostelman (LEAD XXVII) was elected to the Nebraska Legislature representing District 23.

Ken Rahjes (LEAD XXVII) was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives representing District 110.

Jolene Messinger (LEAD 33) was elected to the Board of Directors of the Middle Republican Natural Resource District representing Sub-District 5.

Rick Spencer (LEAD 34) was elected to the Board of Directors of the Middle Republican Natural Resource District representing Sub-District 4.

Anne Meis (LEAD 33) was honored as the 2016 Ag-ceptional Woman of the Year.

Joan Ruskamp (LEAD XXVIII) was inducted into the FarmHER Hall of Fame and was elected to serve as vice chairman for the Cattlemen’s Beef Promotion & Research Board.

Steve Tippery (LEAD XXVIII) accompanied Governor Pete Ricketts on a Nebraska agricultural promotion tour to China.

Tabbatha Cornelius (LEAD 34) was accepted to participate in the Nebraska Cattlemen’s Young Cattlemen’s Conference.

Tracy Behnken (LEAD XV) was honored for an Omaha Children’s Museum exhibit, “Once Upon a Farm.” This exhibit received the 2016 Communicator-Exhibit Award from the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents.

Nancy Eberle (LEAD XII) received the Gregg Christensen Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame Award for her work in entrepreneurship curriculum and resource development for youth and adult entrepreneurs.

Tom Schwarz (LEAD X) was honored as the 2017 Outstanding LEAD Alum by the Nebraska LEAD Alumni Association.

Congratulations LEAD 35

March 10, 2017, the following Nebraska LEAD 35 Fellows received their program completion certificates.

Chris Armstrong, North Bend
Blake Bierman, Arnold
Jon Brabec, Wahoo
Drew Cramer, Cambridge
Seth Davison, Lincoln
Brenda Dutcher, Humboldt
Kim Eberly, Aurora
Linda Emanuel, North Bend
Josh Frizzell, Kearney
Cale Giese, Wayne

Nicholas Hatz, Omaha
Tim Higgins, Crete
Leander Hopkins, Bayard
Andy Jobman, Gothenburg
Jana Jobman, Gothenburg
Lloyd Johnson, Broken Bow
Jason Kloeppe, Bartley
Sam Krueger, Blue Hill
Nate Lehmann, Gibbon
Raymond Morse, Norfolk

Steve Niewohner, Snyder
Jordan Nun, Lincoln
Logan Pribbeno, Imperial
Gerry Sheets, Sargent
Clint Shipman, Red Cloud
Curtis Stallbaumer, Oconto
Sye Tecker, Parks
Melissa Wheeler, Alvo
Matthew Wiegand, Lincoln
Tracy Zink, Indianola

Thank You Banquet Table Sponsors

Briar Rose Dairy
Cramer Farms
David & Jana Jobman
Farm Credit Services of America
Farmers National Company
Frontier Cooperative
Henningsen Foods, Inc.
Higgins Family
GW Trucking
Kamler Farms
LEAD III

LEAD Alumni Association
Nebraska Agribusiness Club
Nebraska Corn Board
Nebraska Farm Bu. Federation
Nebraska Soybean Board
Omaha Agribusiness Club
Sheets Irrigation
The Seed Source, Inc.
Webster Ag
Wells Fargo Agribusiness
Yield Champions

Thank You 2017 Banquet Sponsors

We extend our thanks to:

- Nebraska Agribusiness Club
- Omaha Agribusiness Club
- LEAD III

for supporting the Nebraska LEAD Program by underwriting a portion of the cost of the Annual Recognition Banquet. Their continued, generous support allowed us to hold a fine dinner program to honor our LEAD 35 Fellows.
Our Bold Beginnings

For a number of years I had been considering applying for LEAD but never actually made the commitment. Today, reflecting over the first year, I feel so fortunate that I did commit and so grateful to be chosen to participate in such a fine-tuned leadership program. My eyes and ears have been opened to the vast number of topics and issues that impact agriculture and our state. I look forward to each seminar, the presentations and seeing my fellow classmates, and have a new found passion for learning. I can’t wait to see what year two has in store.

—Nora Turner, Lincoln

During such divisive times, what an amazing opportunity it is to sit down with your peers and respectfully discuss the complicated problems our communities, state and country face! I return home from each seminar absolutely exhausted – physically, mentally, and emotionally drained from so much information and in-depth interaction. It’s obvious that LEAD is planting seeds in my heart, mind and soul, and I am excited to watch them grow. I have no doubt that this experience will bear fruit for decades to come.

—Alex McKiernan, Martel

Congratulations and Condolences

Congratulations:

Alyssa (LEAD 32) Smola-Johnston and Nathan Johnston who were married on December 31.
Brandon (LEAD 34) and Jill Mason on the birth of their daughter, Charolette Olivia, on September 19.
Nick (LEAD 33) and Kory Fowler on the birth of their son, Grady Dustin, on September 23.
Lloyd (LEAD 36) and Sheena Johnson on the birth of their son, Cullen Lloyd, on November 6.
Megan (LEAD XXVIII) and Tyler Williams on the birth of their son, Walker Walster, on November 9.
Shane (LEAD 36) and Kelly Terrell on the birth of their daughter, Brett Kathryn, on November 17.
Michael Ann (LEAD 33) and Justin Relka on the birth of their daughter, Elliet Grayce, on January 3.
Aaron (LEAD XXX) and Allie Raymond on the birth of their daughter, Clara Ann, on February 7.
Bryan (LEAD 32) and Crystal Buskirk on the birth of their daughter, Adelyn Lee, on February 23.
Terry (LEAD XXVIII) and Chandra (LEAD 3.1) Horky on the birth of their son, Toby Wayne, on March 3.
Neil (LEAD XXIII) and Stephanie (LEAD XXVII) Stedman on the birth of their son, Bridger David, on March 14.
Darren (LEAD XXVIII) and Stacy Nelson on the birth of their son, Merritt James, on April 6.

Condolences:

We pass on our condolences to the family of Paul (LEAD XXVIII) and Deb Gangwish (LEAD 34) on the loss of Paul’s father. Also in our thoughts are the family Brian Zimmerman (LEAD XIX) on loss of his father, the family of Lori Potter (LEAD XX) on the loss of her mother, and the family of Joan Ruskamp (LEAD XXVIII) on the passing of her father.
The Nebraska LEAD Program also mourns the loss of Jeanene Wehrbin, who passed away on November 6. Jeanene was a long-time supporter of the Nebraska LEAD Program, as well as the Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Nebraska agriculture.
Applicants Wanted to apply for Nebraska LEAD Class 37

Applications are available for Nebraska LEAD.

The application deadline is

Class 37.

Seminars begin fall 2017.


The 2017 Allen G. Blezek Friend of LEAD recipient, Ken Madden of West Des Moines, Iowa, with Kerry Glandt, President of the Nebraska LEAD Alumni Association.

Thank you, Ken, for providing essential leadership in the development of the Nebraska LEAD Alumni Association.

UNL does not discriminate based upon any protected status. Please see go.unl.edu/nondiscrimination. ©2017, The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska. All rights reserved.