

Cochran Fellowship for International Agricultural Understanding
ISU Swine Training Program for Latin Americans
May 30 to June 12, 2006

Eleven participants from the Latin American countries of Peru, Panama, Nicaragua, Chile, Costa Rica and Guatemala visited Iowa to learn about the pork industry, production methods and the organizations assisting the industry. The Value Added Agriculture Program (VAAP) staff put together the program itinerary and secured translation services from ISU ag students who are native Spanish speakers. Ray Hansen and Madeline Schultz led the project and hosted the group during their two week stay in Iowa. Sherry Hoyer from the Iowa Pork Industry Center, helped arrange several of the speakers and many campus units provided important training for the Cochran Fellows. The Fellows also had the opportunity to visit swine farms, experience rural Iowa, learn about cooperatives and biodiesel, and attend the World Pork Expo.

The swine training program began with an overview of Iowa agriculture, and the swine industry in particular, as well as an overview of the university. On campus, the Cochran Fellows visited with the Iowa Pork Industry Center, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Meat Labs, College of Veterinary Medicine and Diagnostic Lab, Swine Teaching and Research Farms, and the USDA – ARS swine manure management/air quality laboratories, in addition to VAAP and AgMRC.

Several ISU professors and others provided training on specific topics including Ken Stalder – sow management, Palmer Holden – swine nutrition and tour of research farms, Colin Johnson - outreach programs and financial management, Max Rothschild – genetics, Mark Honeyman – research and Extension, Brian Kerr – USDA-ARS research updates and lab tour, James Lummus – National Pork Board producer education materials and goals, Mike Meetz- tour of diagnostic vet labs, and James McKean and Alex Ramirez – topics in swine health.

In addition to tours of the ISU swine farms, the Cochran Fellows toured two other Iowa Swine farms. They visited with Herman Tripp in Greene County to see his new construction, innovative waste handling systems and functioning sow unit. They also drove to Palo Alto County to meet Extension Swine Specialist, Jerry Weiss, to learn more about Extension and view concentrated swine production areas. Mac Luna, and his wife Pam Smith, both veterinarians, gave presentations to the group at the Extension office and then guided a tour of Kolasch Sow Farm.

Of particular interest to the group, was how producers work together within the swine industry. They had the opportunity to visit with Gary Huber - Practical Farmers of Iowa, Kelly Biensen and Leah Siebrecht – Eden Natural, Rich Degner – Iowa Pork Producers Association, Dallas Hockman - National Pork Board, and Joel Severinghaus – Iowa Farm Bureau Federation.

The Fellows appreciated the opportunity to visit West Central Cooperative to learn about the bio fuels industry, view grain handling facilities and discuss the outlook for alternative feeds. They also visited the Clause Beef Farm to learn about marketing on the grid and feeding distillers grains.

The World Pork Expo was a highlight of the training program. More than 31,000 people, including the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns, attended the 18th annual World Pork Expo, the National Pork Producers Council's trade show and showcase for the pork industry. The Cochran Fellows joined pork producers and exhibitors from around the country at the Iowa State Fairgrounds June 8-10, sampling pork barbecue, visiting the 1,000 exhibit booths of the 450 companies in attendance, watching swine shows and sales and participating in various educational seminars. The number of international visitors is estimated at 2,300 traveling from some 50 different countries.

In addition to swine industry training, the Cochran Fellows enjoyed visiting Living History Farms and the Choose Iowa dinner and music event. The group enjoyed some of the area's best restaurants, two picnic cook outs at area parks, an Iowa Cubs baseball game and local shopping. A farewell dinner and program at ISU's Memorial Union gave them a chance to share their experiences and thoughts about the Cochran training program.

Participants evaluated the program well and one participant stated, "We learned we are but one country in Latin America, with friends in the United States." Most notably, the group was amazed and impressed with the level of cooperation among farmers, universities and the government to work together for the good of all farmers, large or small and the swine industry as a whole. They also realized the U.S. does not have all the answers to industry issues (such as manure management), but saw how dedicated all players in the industry are to solving problems and making improvements.