Crops Contests and Study Abroad Australia

By Ozzie Abaye

Students from Virginia Tech, Kansas State University, Iowa State and the University of Wisconsin-Platteville recently returned from Australia where competed in the Australian Universities Crops Competition (AUCC). The four US schools provided a total of 24 students who joined with 36 students from five Australian agricultural universities for the competition. Both in 2015 and 2016, the Virginia Tech students were sponsored by the Virginia and Soybeans Board, Virginia Crop Improvement Association, and the department of Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences. In 2015, additional support was provided by Agronomy Society of America (ASA Reinvest Program). The students receiving the ASA funds were the top six winners in the national Collegiate Crops Contests held in Kansas City and Chicago in November 2014 and 2015.

In October 2016, three Wisconsin-Platteville students joined with six students from Virginia Tech led Ozzie Abaye and Patricia Donovan. The team members from Virginia Tech were Robert “Robbie” Longest (Hanover County), Lucas Rector (Washington County), Jamie Hodnett (Pittsylvania County), Joshua “Josh” Bryant (Northumberland County), Watkins “Watt” Pittard (Mecklenburg County), and William “Perry” Stafford (West Virginia); while Joel Dieckhoff, Emily Hefty and Katelynn Mauk, represented Wisconsin-Platteville. The Wisconsin-Platteville students were registered through Virginia Tech for the duration of the program. We arrived in Australia five days prior to the contests in Temora. We travelled from Melbourne north through Victoria and southern NSW to Temora for four days of study and tours prior to the contest. Stops included several farms with mixed cropping and livestock production systems, an irrigated rice farm, a dairy, a cattle feedlot, the Coleambally Irrigation Cooperative, the Yanco Agricultural Institute focused on sustainable production of rice and horticultural crops, a vineyard and winery, a grain terminal, and a paddle steamer cruise on the Murray River. After the competition, our trip concluded with a stop at Healesville Sanctuary to see Australian native animals and sightseeing in Melbourne.
The AUCC was sponsored by Grain Growers of Australia with additional support from several Australian agribusinesses and agencies. The event was held over three days at the Temora Agricultural Innovation Center managed by FarmLink in Temora, NSW. The competition included a seed identification section, three exams over production of selected Australian crops, commercial grading of wheat samples, a business management problem, field yield estimates and management recommendations, and a live crop, weed and disease evaluation component. As part of the event, contestants also observed research projects being conducted on site, participated in a career fair with agribusiness sponsors, learned about Grain Growers’ ProductionWise farm management program, and toured a seed production farm and a licorice factory. Photo 1 shows contest orientation by Mr. Michael Southan- General Manager of Grain Growers.

**Student Reflections**

…One more thing I can take away from this trip is that I have a small taste of international experience under my belt. I never thought in a million years I would ever want to travel out of the state for a job and much less out of the country for my job but this trip changed my mind completely. I am hoping that in the near future as I am looking at what job I want to pursue after I graduate that it includes the possibility of international travel, said Mauk.”

“I was so excited that our tour focused on the agriculture side of Australia,” said Hefty. “We were only in the city for one day. I enjoyed the aspect of enjoying the culture and visiting actual farmers.”

“We went to Hart Brothers Seed Company,” said Mauk. “That was my favorite tour. During the summer I had an internship at a seed production company in Livingston. Getting to compare what I was doing in the United States to what they are doing was very rewarding.”

“A dairy farm was also on our itinerary, which excited me because I come from a small dairy farm. It felt like visiting a dairy farm in the Midwest. There were donuts, cakes and drinks on a table and the family was more than happy to chat with us. As the actual tour of the farm got underway, we soon realized the struggles the faced in Australia were basically the same as what we were facing at home! Their milk price was awful, but they also had plans to improve their facilities. It sounded exactly the same as when my family would discuss improvements at home.
It was during this time, we had moments we will remember for long time,” said Dieckhoff and Rector.

“…. The experiences and opportunities involving Australian agriculture and culture during the trip allowed me to broaden my knowledge and understanding of how things are similar and different between Australia and the United States of America”, said Longest.

“The trip was extremely educational and I could not have asked for a better experience. I love being able to apply what I learn in the classroom and being able to connect the dots,” said Hodnett.

![Photo 1 Crops Contests orientation at Temora.](image-url)
Photo 2 – The Virginia Tech Team
Photo 3 – The US and Australia Teams
Photo 4. The 2016 Australian Universities Crops Competition, Temora.

Photo 5. Conversation with the rice farmer
Photo 5, 6 and 7 Healesville Sanctuary, Australian native animals, Melbourne