

Agricultural Study Tours — A Perspective

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We in agriculture are constantly reminded of the continuing dilemma between increasing world population and the available food supply. Continual improvements in communications and transportation help us recognize that the world is our neighborhood.

Realizing that the United States cannot feed the world but must assist developing countries to help themselves has opened many new career opportunities abroad. Educators at 2-year and 4-year agricultural colleges, public and private, have developed programs to better prepare students for international career opportunities (1, 3, 5). These programs vary from interdisciplinary seminars to a developed minor in international agriculture (2). Many of the employment opportunities for B. S. graduates in international agriculture are available through governmental or church-related volunteer organizations, often at relatively low salaries (4).

As is true at many institutions, we at Kansas State University believe that a fourth mission, International Programs, is an integral component, complementing the basic land grant functions of teaching, research, and extension. To allow undergraduate (or graduate) students an opportunity to study diverse agricultural systems on a first-hand basis, faculty at Kansas State University initiated an Agricultural Study Tour in 1974 to Central and South America. Since then, tours have been conducted to Europe and to Australia and New Zealand. When properly organized and conducted, an agricultural study tour can be a significant elective in an undergraduate degree program. Students on tour can gain valuable insights regarding other cultures and other agricultural systems that are impossible to grasp from even the best written accounts or visual presentations. Study tours add an international dimension to the educational programs in agriculture for both students and faculty.

The Study Tour Leader

After deciding to develop an agricultural study tour, faculty must obtain a competent leader. Essential qualities of a successful tour director are similar to those of a successful teacher: an ability to plan and a genuine interest in helping students attain a meaningful international agriculture experience, enthusiasm about the program, willingness to invest days and weeks of extra time, and sincere concern and respect for students.

The study tour leader sets the tone for the entire trip and to a large extent determines the overall success of the

program. The leader's spouse is also a most important team member in hosting students before and after the tour and may accompany the group on the tour. Having adult leaders of both sexes frequently is an advantage, particularly in stressful situations.

Initial Planning

The study tour leader(s) must initiate planning long before the intended departure. Developing the first study tour may take more than a year, and some effort will be required throughout most of each year between succeeding tours. After deciding the area of the world to be studied, leaders must locate contact persons who can assist with local arrangements. The value of these persons is immeasurable in achieving a successful study tour. Former students, both American and international, university or industry colleagues, both foreign and domestic, personnel at International Centers such as CIMMYT or CIAT, and Agriculture Attaches are often eager to assist in planning and/or in showing tour groups the agriculture in their country. Host persons can also facilitate trips into the countryside where students must go to appreciate the agriculture of the region. Transportation and housing away from larger population centers are often difficult, but seeing the rural villages and agriculture and eating the native foods are rich rewards for the extra effort.

Early initial planning is also important because airline reservations must be made well in advance to secure group rates and to allow the exact scheduling that is essential. In South America, for example, flights between some cities are available only once or twice weekly, rather than daily. Long flights may be scheduled overnight to save on lodging costs and to allow daytime for tours. Overnight travel by ferry across the North Sea between Great Britain and the Netherlands not only provides wise use of valuable overseas time but also exposes students to another mode of transportation.

As soon as the preliminary itinerary and group size are established for the study tour, a cost estimate must be made. Available resources to pay expenses of the study tour instructor will vary among institutions. Optimum group size may vary depending on such resources, but should be limited to a reasonable number. Groups larger than 25 are difficult for one person to manage checking into hotels, clearing customs, etc. A reduced-fare ticket, often available upon purchase of a specific number of full fares, may be used advantageously to fund a graduate assistant to assist with some of these duties during the tour.

Student financing of study tours can become a problem that permits only students with adequate financial means to participate. A rather liberal university loan

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program as well as scholarships can provide financing for many students to participate in this worthy international agriculture experience.

Because of the substantial cost, the first study tour may need diligent advertising. In succeeding years, former participants inform other students and the desired number is easier to obtain. Satisfied participants can be the greatest promoters for the program. Early awareness of international travel plans also allows students necessary advanced planning.

About 2/3 of the required number should be tentatively enrolled by the end of school in May for next January intersession or by Christmas for a next May-June intersession. Obviously, because of weather, a tour to South America or Australia during January (their summer) is much preferred, whereas Europe is better to visit in May-June. The December-January and May-June intersession periods also tend to fit into farming schedules, internships, and other summer work experiences.

If student interest at your institution is insufficient for a study tour each year, you may be able to cooperate with another university in an adjacent state or with other colleges in your state. Kansas State University has cooperated with the University of Missouri-Columbia, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Hesston (KS) College, Mid-American Nazarene College (Olathe, KS), and Fort Hays (KS) State University on various study tours. A less-desirable alternative is to schedule study tours on alternate years. Co-sponsorship of travel tours between institutions allows for alternating primary responsibility for the tour and permits important professional and social interaction among both students and faculty

Preparation for the Study Tour

The three months before departure are vital for completing preparations such as obtaining passports, visas, and inoculations against diseases for all participants. Equally important is preparing students properly to benefit maximally from their short study in each country. Meeting twice monthly in the evenings seems optimum. Students become acquainted with each other and build a sense of community. Since they will be interacting closely during the 3 to 4 weeks on the study tour, they need to get along well with one another. Any extreme clashes in personalities should be solved before the trip to avoid possible problems later.

The students also should become familiar with countries they will visit. Teams of 2 or 3 students may present written and/or oral summaries about different countries at the evening sessions. A more desirable alternative is to have international students show slides of their countries to the group and discuss the important agricultural commodities, customs, and foods. Students from previous tours are always excited about sharing their experiences with upcoming groups.

Students should be encouraged to learn some of the language, at very least to be able to read menus, road-signs, etc. Colleagues who have traveled abroad and

faculty in the language departments can be invaluable resource persons as you prepare for the tour.

The Study Tour

If your planning was excellent and your contact persons have made arrangements as you agreed, the tour itself is pure enjoyment. A primary requirement is to stay on schedule as much as possible. If something unforeseen arises, quickly explain the problem to everyone and develop a solution. As soon as you arrive at any location, immediately reconfirm your transportation for departure to avoid any misunderstandings on that day. Check by telephone each day the next day's planned stops to avoid problems before they arise.

Your schedule should allow some free time for students to explore a little on their own. Some students will want more free time than others, so a compromise must be developed. A study-tour is often quite tiring, so you should have some recovery time built into the schedule at 4- to 5-day intervals. Despite your planned schedule, be certain to take advantage of any extra opportunities that occur along the way. For example, when traveling by bus in Ecuador, we observed harvesting in progress on a large banana plantation along the road. When we stopped and explained our interest, the people were quite pleased to explain their growing and export operation to us.

The tour leader must insure that everyone is involved in the planned activities. Avoid letting students form small "groups" to the exclusion of a few. Tact and diplomacy are key attributes of the study tour leader when everyone is tired and a planned three-hour bus ride turns into six. A picnic in the beautiful Black Forest of West Germany or an hour to shop for a Swiss watch can be a nice break for an otherwise long bus ride.

Some activities also should be included just for fun—preferably planned for weekends, because it is often difficult to schedule agricultural stops on weekends. If you go to South America, you shouldn't miss seeing a beach in Rio, or the soccer stadium in Sao Paulo, or Machu Picchu in Peru, or the Cathedral in Mexico City. Similarly, visits to a watch factory in Switzerland, Tivoli in Copenhagen, Vatican City in Rome, the Louvre in Paris and Westminster Abbey in London are musts. Short visits to these or other points of interest such as museums, historical sites, and botanical gardens enrich and broaden the study tour.

Evaluation of the Study Tour

At Kansas State University, students receive approximately one semester credit hour per week spent on an agricultural study tour. They must submit a brief (3 to 5 typed pages) written report. The report should stress primarily their impressions and ideas gained, rather than a diary of daily activities. In addition, each student must take a 35 mm slide camera to photograph points of interest. The slides are required because upon return, virtually all students will be asked to give presentations about their study tour to college groups, church groups,

service clubs, or at 4-H or FFA meetings in their home communities.

About a month after our return, we invited all the participants to our home for a light meal and had each participant show 10 to 12 favorite slides. That created an opportunity to exchange and/or borrow slides for duplication. Reports were collected at this meeting and everyone seemed to enjoy the opportunity to see each other once again and "re-live" the tour through the slides. The Kansas State-University of Missouri football weekend in the fall provides an excellent opportunity for students on the European Tour of the previous summer to get together again.

Based upon comments received from participants, the international agricultural study tour is an extremely worthwhile endeavor. Most agree that although a study tour is expensive, the benefits far outweigh the costs. It becomes an important life-long investment. Some students participate because of potential interest in agricultural missionary work through their church or the Peace Corps. Others seem primarily interested in comparing the livestock, cropping, and/or marketing practices, and still others go just for the opportunity to learn from travel.

Summary

Vast differences exist among agricultural production systems throughout the world. International agricultural study tours offer undergraduate students a unique opportunity to study these systems. Careful planning and considerable preparation are required for a successful study tour. The tour leader plays a key role in the success of the study tour. Student response indicates that study tours are extremely beneficial to participants. We believe that international agricultural study tours greatly broaden the perspectives of all participants and should be offered whenever possible to strengthen undergraduate programs.

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International Crop Production Course

An Investigation of The Agronomic Dimension of World Hunger

David J. Sammons

Abstract

An upper level undergraduate course focusing on the agronomic dimensions of world hunger is described. The course focuses on the problems and potentials for increasing world food supply based on current agronomic knowledge. Emphasis is placed on the international aspects of food crop production, and the interrelationships between agriculture and human populations on small farms in the developing nations of the world.

Course Rationale

World hunger is a multi-dimensional global problem with profound and disturbing social implications for the late twentieth century. As such, it raises issues that must be resolved with intelligence and compassion. In an effort to examine one dimension (agronomic) of this complex problem, a course entitled "International Crop Production" has been developed in the agronomy curriculum at the University of Maryland.

In general, a course in International Crop Production is outside the mainstream of course offerings in a conventional agronomy curriculum. Nevertheless, there

are important reasons for its inclusion as part of the departmental offerings. A broad understanding of the nature of food crop production — its problems and potentials — is necessary for any professional in agriculture in today's world, in which nations are often intimately interconnected and interdependent. In a more general sense, it is important that all students confront the great and recurring public issues of our time — among which are starvation, malnutrition, and hunger. To deal effectively with these issues, whether as a professional or as a concerned citizen, one needs accurate and complete information. This course examines one dimension of the multi-dimensional problem of world hunger. It is necessary for a complete understanding of world hunger but is not in itself sufficient. Further study ought to focus on the social, political, economic, and moral dimensions of world hunger.¹

Course Organization

International Crop Production is taught as an upper level undergraduate course with an average enrollment of about 60 students. Most students who enroll are juniors

¹The University of Maryland is currently developing a cross-disciplinary curriculum module on Global Food Problems. The course described in this paper is designed, in part, to fit into that program. Complementary courses are being developed, or are already being taught, in such other areas as economics, political science, philosophy and morals, food science, and anthropology.

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