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## **K-State students and alumni tour Russian agribusinesses**

**MANHATTAN, KAN., August 16, 2006** – Most students have the opportunity to learn about foreign countries while in the classroom. The Master of Agribusiness (MAB) distance-education program at Kansas State University offers students and alumni a chance to visit some of those countries.

In August, twenty-four MAB students and alumni, faculty and staff, and other agriculturalists traveled to Russia and participated in the second MAB international food and agribusiness trip. The purpose of the trip was to learn more about Russian agriculture and during the 12-day tour, the group visited various agricultural and food related facilities including a dairy farm and broiler facility.

Max Irsik, MAB alum and Assistant Professor of Large Animal Clinical Sciences at the University of Florida in Gainesville said, “It was a great trip -- a wonderful chance to interact with not only MAB faculty, students, and alumni, but also other agriculturists from across the U.S.”

Occupying more than one tenth of the agricultural land on earth including large areas of black soils and favorable climactic conditions, Russia has enormous agricultural production potential. Russia could become a major supplier of world food markets. However as trip participants discovered, due to cultural and economic constraints, the Russian farmer has a long road ahead and continues to rely heavily on outside resources. Many of the professional sites visited, such as the dairy farm and broiler facility, are managed or advised by Americans and individuals from other Western countries.

“The trip to Russia gave me a much greater appreciation for agriculture in the United States. We are light years ahead of them, and without inputs from both European and US scientists, economists and producers, I am not sure Russian agriculture could feed their own populace let alone compete in a global market for agricultural (food) products,” Irsik said. “With that said, there is a tremendous untapped potential with regard to the Russian agriculture industry. Without assistance from not only the United States and other developed countries, I believe it will be very difficult, if not impossible for them to develop their agricultural industry efficiently and in a timely manner.”

The tour also included visits to Cargill's refined vegetable oil and sweetener plant in Efremov and a Caterpillar welding facility in St. Petersburg, as well as presentations by representatives from Monsanto and the Analytical Centre of Agri-Food Economics in Moscow.

"It was great to see companies like Cargill and Caterpillar making a difference in the country as well. Cargill was an excellent neighbor to the city and geared a lot of attention to keeping a good reputation locally, while offering the locals opportunities for employment," Sara Sellers, MAB student and Assistant Manager for Stoney Point Agri Corp. in Melissa, Texas said. "Caterpillar really impressed us with their safety and organization implemented in their manufacturing warehouse."

Participants also learned about Russian agricultural educational opportunities at Moscow State AgroEngineering and St. Petersburg State Agrarian universities. The group met with instructors and administrative leaders at both universities and heard presentations about their educational programs. Both universities teach extensive training of tractors and ag-related equipment.

Sellers said, "The tractor utilization education that the students have the opportunity to obtain was incredible and the faculty of both universities seemed to be very dedicated to their students and programs."

With stops in Moscow, Tula and St. Petersburg, time was set aside for sightseeing and learning about the extensive history of the Russian people. Visits were made to Red Square and the Kremlin, Peter & Paul Fortress, the Hermitage and many other famous sites.

"It was an excellent experience. We really enjoyed the exposure to all the historical sights and getting to learn about the history of such a challenged nation, as well as being really impressed with the agriculture systems," said Sellers.

Previously, the MAB has lead a tour of South America, visiting Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay in 2004, and is beginning to plan for the next international trip in 2008.

"Given the increasing global nature of agriculture, it is important for our students and members of the ag industry to stay current with what is going on around the world," Professor of Agricultural Economics and MAB Program Director Allen Featherstone said. "These kinds of trips allow us to experience global similarities and differences first hand."

Overall, participants learned how important the contributions of Western countries have been for the Russian agricultural industry and that there is a lot of potential for growth and development even with the many challenges and cultural differences between the Russian people and Western nations.

Keith Kennedy, MAB alum and Owner of Agrimind LLC of Burns, Wyoming summed up the trip, “Whenever I think about this great trip to Russia, I just keep coming back to a comment from one of the interpreters: ‘visiting Russia will make you appreciate that the definition of normal is different for each person on earth.’”

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